

## TGOA/MGCA NATIONAL CONVENTION DES MOINES, IA 2004

CLOSING REMARKS JUNE 24, 2004

By Honey Barnekoff, President

Once upon a time in a land not so far away, there were three churches. It came to pass that during the span of a single year, the widely respected and much-loved ministers of those churches decided to leave – either moving to another church or retiring.

And the leaders of those churches were very concerned.

At the first church, they said “It is as if we have a car, but no driver.”

And one of their leaders said, “ I once had a car that I did not drive, so I drained the oil, took off the tires and set it up on bricks. I thought that some day I would want to drive it once more – and I just hoped I would be able to start it again.”

So that in effect is what the leaders did. They let the church sit, hoping that when the new minister came, the church – like the car on bricks – could be started again.

The leaders of the second church said, “We have no one to lead us, but we need to let people know that we are still here.” So they took bricks and propped the doors ajar so that if anyone wandered by, they would know that the church was still open.

The leaders of the third church saw what the others had done. And they said, “The people are the bricks of this church. The road ahead may be difficult, but together, we are up to the challenge. We do not have to wait to start over. We do not need to simply keep the door open. We can build on what we have and make this an even stronger church.”

How like these church members we are: we have the bricks, indeed, we ARE the bricks! TGOA/MGCA and AHS together have everything for which one could wish in any gardening organization. Together we can build on what we have.

We must use the bricks, the programs, the discounts, the reciprocal gardens, the Gardening From the Heart, education, scholarships, the American Gardener, the newsletter, photography contest, our merchandise, youth gardening, our websites, camaraderie, and most of all, ourselves – the bricks – to not just prop the doors open, but to tell other gardeners about our wonderful organizations and to offer to have them participate with us.

The one thing we need at the moment is more members for whom we have so many benefits for so few dollars.

Last fall, I had occasion to call each of the past presidents, not only to see how they were, and in some cases to meet them, but to invite them to attend this meeting. Joe Howland, our longest ago serving president from 1967 is 86, alive and fairly well, still possesses a keen mind and lives in Reno, Nv. He suggested that I ask each of those past presidents to write their history: why they began gardening; why they joined the Men’s Garden Club; what had transpired during their active years in the organization and what they have observed since those days. Nearly all twenty of them agreed to participate. Their deadline for submitting their articles is the fall board meeting in Overland Park, Ks. November 4-6.

Not all of those presidents are still capable of writing their memoirs, but in some cases their wives have agreed to help. We are grateful to them for such assistance.

I already have three installments and it will be very interesting reading once all the data has been collected.

As you know, not all of our history is pretty. But I asked the gentlemen to try not to gloss over the ugly, but tell it just the way they remember the facts.

Now you know if you ask twenty people to tell about the same events, you will probably receive twenty versions, for each of us have our own perspective. Trying to make a cohesive, continuous story of it may not be possible. But when they are all received, it won't take long to know how to handle the sum of their tales.

Several times in our history, we have come to a crisis point and I believe we were there again last November. When I took office, we were the smallest the organization has ever been and perhaps in the worst financial condition that has ever existed.

Through the partnership with the American Horticultural Society, we have one more brick to add to our pile and what a brick it is! We should have no trouble at all recruiting new members, or hanging on to the existing members, with that partnership added to our own benefits.

Now to tie all these parts together: the bricks, the histories being written, and AHS. What will history have to say about what we have accomplished with our opportunities?

Will we be like the church who decided to sit and hoped when the new minister came, the church – like the car on bricks – could be started again? Will we prop open the doors with those bricks in the hope that people will see that we are still here?

Or will we be those bricks, use the bricks, and build on what we have to make a stronger organization? How will the next chapter of our history record what we have done with our opportunity?