

Gardeners to smell roses at convention

ROBERT W. DALTON, Staff Writer – Spartanburg Herald-Journal – June 9, 2005

People from every blooming part of the country will converge on Spartanburg next spring when The Gardeners of America/Men's Garden Clubs of America brings its national convention to town.

The group will hold its convention April 20-22, 2006 at the Marriott at Renaissance Park.

Honey Barnekoff of Overland Park, Kan., the club's immediate past president and its chairwoman of convention site planning, visited Spartanburg Wednesday and took in the sites, which included lunch at the Beacon Drive-In.

Barnekoff, the only female president in the club's 73-year history, said the seeds for bringing the national convention to Spartanburg were planted several years ago, when the national organization held its board meeting here. She said the size and accomplishments of the local group make Spartanburg the ideal location for the national convention.

With about 170 members the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club is the second-largest affiliate in the nation. About 40 percent of the Spartanburg club's members are women.

"We're going to do everything we can to encourage our members to come here, to learn about Spartanburg, it's beautification projects and to see the organization at work," Barnekoff said.

"There is so much to see and do, it will be hard to know what to choose."

That decision will be left to the local

Men's Garden Club. Club member Henry Pittman is already compiling a list that includes Hatcher Garden and Woodland Preserve; the Milliken Arboretum; and projects sponsored by the Pride Task Force, the Noble Trees Foundation, Tree Spartanburg, the Group of 100 and the Graffiti Foundation.

The Spartanburg Men's Garden Club takes on a variety of projects each year on its own. The group has nearly completed treescaping five miles of Highway 221 and has planted more than 2,000 street and highway trees. In addition, members perform landscape evaluations for businesses.

Pittman said the convention theme, "Enhancing the Enhancements," would showcase what can happen when several organizations with the same goal work together. He said the idea was inspired by something that textile magnate Roger Milliken told him several years ago.

"He said we need to find a way to share our experience with other communities across the state and the nation," Pittman said. "That's what we want to do, share with a couple of hundred people the techniques that have been successful in Spartanburg."

This year's national convention was held last week in Palm Beach, Fla., and only 90 members showed up. Don Crowder, who along with Linda McHam is the convention co-chair, hopes to have more than twice that many people visit Spartanburg.

"We're planning on 150 to 200," Crowder said. "I think 150 would be a pretty decent turnout."

Crowder said that planning is well under way, and that having the hotel locked in this early is a big plus. He said the local club would shift into high gear in the next few weeks to nail down the schedule of events.

"We've got a tentative schedule, but that needs to be tweaked, twisted and turned on its head," Crowder said.

Spartanburg Mayor Bill Barnet said the club's decision to hold its national convention is good news for the economy, but it's also a "reaffirmation of the energy and enthusiasm of so many people and diverse institutions that have invested in the aesthetic attractiveness of this community."

"This community has a special treasure in its commitment to fountains, greenspace, statues and quality of life amenities," Barnet said. "That's what they've seen, and it's what they're honoring by coming here."

Robert W. Dalton can be reached at 562-7274 or bob.dalton@shj.com.