

GCA Annual Meeting  
May 17 -19, 2019  
Boston, MA

This past May, I was invited to represent The Weeders as a delegate at the GCA Annual meeting in Boston. This was my first foray into a GCA national conference and I felt some trepidation....I had heard about the fancy shoes, scarves and big southern hair. But I am a Boston girl, so I knew I would feel at home in "my city". The result...although a Weeder for almost 15 years, I came away with a new found respect and admiration for GCA, and for the 18,000 members who contribute their time and energy to Garden, Create, Advocate....the GCA motto!

We began our weekend Friday afternoon by traveling to nearby Chestnut Hill, where we toured several amazing gardens, in the rain, and were entertained on the bus by a lively member of the Chestnut Hill Garden Club. Through her, we learned that many of their members are involved in a composting effort called Bootstrap ...for a small fee, Bootstrap drops off a 5 gallon bucket to your home, you fill it with scraps, they pick it up at the end of each week, compost it and return the composted soil to you. We also saw Tom Brady's house from the back of one of the gardens, but then probably only Lorraine and I care about that!

The days consisted of business meetings with engaging speakers, roundtable discussions and interactive panels; and, a chance in the afternoons to walk around beautiful Boston harbor. I also learned a lot from the other GCA members about what they do in their clubs, how we are all independent, however share a common goal....again, to Garden, Create, Advocate.

There was a lot of information to process....I have listed some of the highlights for me:

- Consider the Healthy Garden Pledge. Homeowners use 10 times more chemicals than farmers.
- David Rockefeller Jr. spoke about the NGO Oceana and a program called Sailors for the Sea, the world's only ocean conservation organization that engages, educates and activates the sailing and boating community toward restoring ocean health. As he implored, "Save the oceans, feed the world".
- GCA continues the tradition of speaking out on a local level and focusing on education, teaching children about nature, growing plants, the earth. During the weekend, there was a consistent message about engaging children, meeting them where they are, "swelling the ranks". Programs such as Seed Your Future at Longwood Gardens seek to promote horticulture and inspire people to pursue a career working with plants. Currently, 40% of jobs involving horticulture go unfilled due to a lack of qualified candidates. Begin with reaching out and educating the children. Make it fun. Combat "plant blindness".
- One club developed a unique fundraising activity that involved educating children about plants and conservation by using art. Begin by teaching a group of children about plants and the need to protect the environment. Then have the children

draw an imaginary flower, and members of the garden club create arrangements reflecting the imaginary flowers. On the night of the fundraiser, the children's pictures are displayed, the children are invited to see their art work and the flower arrangements are sold. This club was also able to secure sponsors for the evening, with food and drinks provided by sponsors. This was a great way to create community involvement, youth education and fundraising.

- Beacon Hill Garden Club has a "sandwich board" with their club's name on it, which they bring with them when they work on a community garden. When people stop by to say "thanks", they know who they are thanking and they raise awareness about the involvement of garden clubs in the community. Not a bad idea for Luddington and Strafford Station.

This is only a small smattering of the information that was provided during the weekend. And I forgot to include how interesting it was to meet and engage with the amazing women that are involved in GCA clubs around the country. And I didn't even buy new shoes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Doyle