

Looking Back at Convention 2011

'A Growing Experience – From the Ground Up'

Just over 430 registrants including District 13 volunteers gathered at the Radisson Hotel in Sudbury, Ontario for the 105th annual OHA Convention from July 15 to 17, 2011. The weather cooperated and delivered a weekend of glorious sunny, sultry days. The city put its best foot forward with wonderful floral displays and welcoming signs which were visible at Bell Park and on the Rainbow Centre's digital Jumbotron.

This year's convention was hosted by District 13, comprised of 14 societies spanning the geographical area between Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury, including French River and Manitoulin Island. Some 70 District 13 volunteers, sporting orange t-shirts bearing the theme *A Growing Experience* and a seedling graphic, a dedicated OHA Board and Executive, and countless Sudbury organizations and citizens worked earnestly and passionately together over the past two years to craft a truly unique program that showcased the OHA in action.

The theme, *A Growing Experience-From the Ground Up*, reflected District 13's desire to share with gardeners of widely varying skills and knowledge some initiatives that have originated from the ground up - from grassroots members who have led us to experience growing pains, the stretching of our imaginations, and the subsequent growth and rejuvenation in our societies. By fostering a sense of awareness and discovery and encouraging advocacy and interaction, we hoped to cultivate a sense of openness to all possibilities and allow ourselves to truly bloom where we are planted.

The Convention kicked off on Thursday, July 14th at 9 pm when some 60-70 people gathered outside the Radisson. Armed with *Get out of Jail Free* cards, trowels, and surplus plants, this merry band of gardeners marched through the downtown streets to the Market Square to do a bit of guerrilla gardening. Within a very short period of time, they weeded, planted trees along an unsightly chain link fence, and transformed a bare patch of land into a prospective garden.

OHA President Vickie Wiemer blessed the garden while her husband Rupert banged in a painted wooden sign bearing the message *OHA Gardeners--- Please Water Me* into the ground. It was quite a proud moment to see and hear such an intergenerational group working and laughing together as they 'vandalized with nature'. MCTV reporters were on hand to



videotape the entire event and it was aired on television on Sunday for all to see.

Opening Ceremonies held on Friday, July 15th were announced by Mary Rossiter of Sault Ste. Marie who served as Town Crier. Piper David Kennedy led the parade of flag bearers, special guests, Past Presidents, Directors, Youth Camp delegates, and Officers of the OHA into the session. Dr. Roger Nash, Sudbury's Poet Laureate, read two stirring poems including one specially penned for this year's Convention. Dr. Stephen Monet spoke about *Sudbury's Regreening Story*, followed by Helen Scutt of OMAFRA who presented *Growing Your Membership, Cultivating Diversity*.

A total of eleven interesting Powerpoint presentations on a variety of topics were held at the Rainbow Cinemas to offer good acoustics and comfortable seating. Four different bus tours left the hotel on both Friday and Saturday afternoons. For those who craved hands-on learning opportunities, the Convention provided two workshops - one on community greening projects and the other on seed saving, courtesy of the Evergreen Foundation and Seeds of Diversity Canada. Floral design enthusiasts had four judging updates to choose from. Two computer seminars were held for those who sought information or solutions to particular problems.

Competitions in the various categories for both adults and youth were set up and on display in the hotel's Notre Dame and Grand Paris rooms. A meeting for OHA Judges was held on late Friday afternoon; the Youth Leaders' Meeting late Saturday afternoon.

Friday evening's dinner was full of fun and frolic! We were treated to a short visit from the Sud-berry Bear who brought greetings on behalf of the Sudbury Blueberry Festival and posed for photos. Markus Schwabe, host of CBC's Morning North program, acted as Master of Ceremonies. He introduced the three entertainment acts and announced the winners of the Silent Auction. We

were treated to lively swing music from the Hilltoppers Band that got people up and dancing including OHA President Vickie and Rupert Wiemer. This was followed by some nifty footwork by the Manitoulin Saturday Night dancers and wonderful tunes sung by M.C. Crooner. By the end of the evening, District 13 had realized a profit of just over \$3900!