

Awards Tributes, 2026

Louise D. Mann Award: Cynthia Corhan-Aitken

The Louise D. Mann Award recognizes vision, leadership, and meaningful accomplishment in advancing the ideals of our club. This year's recipient embodies all these ideals with extraordinary grace and generosity.

Since receiving the Elsie Bristol Novice Award in 2006, she has not stopped. Her countless honors are a visible recognition of the passion and commitment that drive her multitude of projects. She never says no. She has co-chaired flower shows, led workshops and programs, chaired Flower Design, graciously opened her home for two holiday teas, helped reimagine Church Street as a native habitat, coordinated the delivery of more than five hundred plants to the Circle, and managed the brick replacement construction project. With Karen Fricke, she also led our April 27 party and, amazingly, found time to produce a film. And her competitive designs are gorgeous!

Most of all, she is always there when needed — generous, capable, welcoming, and kind. She is, quite simply, the personification of our club's values.

Howard Van Vleck Award: Celia Radek

This year, we have a new award — the Howard Van Vleck Award — to be awarded to a member or non-member for outstanding achievement in civic engagement designed to improve and enhance the greater Montclair community.

The committee hardly needed to discuss the first awardee because the choice was so obvious. There is almost nothing that happens in the Club that doesn't involve this woman and hasn't from the moment she joined in 2002 — flower shows, communications, flower design, horticulture, workshops, environment/civic, yearbook, youth, Avis, Crane House. The list of awards, including Louise D. Mann in 2017, is too long to list — check the website.

But this award is not just for what she has given to the club: it's for her contributions to the whole community. She has changed the shape of this town. For many years, she led planting for May in Montclair, placing orders not just for the club but also for Montclair parks, BIDS, churches, the Y, and schools. Most recently she designed the circle on Valley Road.

For the past decade, she has been a vital part of the Montclair Scholarship Fund, which this year awarded more than half a million dollars to Montclair High School students with financial need. As last year's Scholarship Fund co-president said, "She is always looking for ways to make other people's work easier; she is never one to avoid responsibility herself. She is forward-thinking and quick to embrace change. Her commitment, conscientiousness, and devotion to every cause are unmatched. The Montclair community is lucky to have her."

This speech is way too long, but there is no other way to begin to recognize the quiet accomplishments of Celia Radek. Celia, please accept the new Howard Van Vleck Award.

Till Beatty Allis Award: Barbara Baletti

Flower design and design education is central to every garden club's identity, and, without question, our club has some of the best designers in the country — thanks in no small part to our current Chair of Flower Design. Her passion for the art has shaped years of service as both Chair and Vice Chair of the committee. Through workshops and mentorship, she has encouraged designers at every level, especially hesitant beginners. Her creativity has enlivened our flower shows and monthly competitions with imaginative schedules and fresh ideas. And she has researched the environmental awfulness of traditional Oasis foam and has helped lead our club — kicking and screaming — toward more environmentally responsible alternatives. She once described this chairmanship as her ideal role, and her artistry, leadership, and generosity have enriched the club for many years. It is my great pleasure to present the Till Beatty Allis Award for Flower Design to Barbara Baletti.

Bauer Horticultural Award: Karen Fricke

Today America is moving dramatically toward a new kind of gardening — one that replaces individual outdoor rooms with a national effort to expand native plants and create a joined pathway for pollinators across the country. Leading this project to save our native wildlife — both animal and vegetable — has been the passion of year's awardee.

Yet this is only one of the extraordinary gifts she has brought to our club. She has flooded our calendars this year with workshops on everything from sharpening shears to taking

botanical arts to a new level. A Master Gardener and soon-to-be certified judge, she lectures locally and statewide on native gardening and was the keynote speaker at last week's Garden Club of New Jersey annual meeting.

We are proud — along with the bees and our most vulnerable furry, flying, and crawling neighbors — to present the Bauer Horticultural Award to Karen Fricke.

Special Tribute — Bricks Project: Susan Benner, Cynthia Corhan-Aitken, Michele Trevenen

It started as a simple need to repair our crumbling Avis pathways but grew into a design and fundraising triumph. The Ways and Means committee figured out that members and those who loved members and the beautiful gardens would be happy to buy a memorial brick to shine forever in the new pathways. Michele Trevelyn and Susan Benner found an excellent brickmaker, and coordinated the effort to persuade our community to buy the bricks. Cynthia Corhan-Aitken, as always, jumped in to use her landscaping expertise to create the improved design, and to supervise the construction project. While this tribute is for each of them, it is also a tribute to the inventiveness of our members when they unleash their woman power.

Special Tribute — Historian: Deborah Hirsch

Traditionally, we don't name our honorees until the end of our introduction. But of course, you will all guess the name of our valued historian, whose passion for the history and achievements of our Club has added a deep dimension to our centennial celebrations. Without her efforts, we would not be aware of our earliest members' extraordinary contributions to our community, from the creation of the Iris Gardens to the victory gardens of World War II and the hundreds of trees flourishing throughout Montclair. Cynthia recalled: "Her knowledge and, almost as important, her organizational ability, was essential for the film we created for our anniversary party." It is our pleasure to award a special tribute as club historian to Deb Hirsch.

Special Tribute — Avis: Ana Zalles Moore

At a recent Avis committee meeting, Ana Zalles Moore described the garden as an orchestra, with each member contributing to its beauty and success. As a relatively new club member, Ana bravely stepped into the role of conductor, leading a committee of 70 members with energy, grace, and remarkable skill.

Drawing on her professional background as an environmental engineer, she created meaningful roles for members of every interest and ability, ensuring the gardens flourished through teamwork and shared purpose. She welcomed Bed Captains and newcomers into her home, organized the tool sheds, collaborated with Barbara Meyer on fountain repairs, and encouraged every member to participate and share ideas.

Her enthusiasm, inclusiveness, and thoughtful leadership have left a lasting mark on Avis Campbell. Ana, thank you for your extraordinary contribution and for the spirit of fellowship you continue to inspire in us all.

Bloomies — Everything Everywhere, All the Time Award: Clare Kuch

This new member may have thought she was traveling under the radar, but she has been noticed — and appreciated — in every aspect of the club since she joined us in 2025. She attended almost every workshop and program from the beginning, she shared her lovely flower designs, she toiled at Avis. When a call went out for volunteers, she was always there. As Woody Allen said, “80 percent of success is showing up.” Truly Clare Kuch deserves the Everything, Everywhere, All the Time Bloomie Award.



Bloomies —Golden Trowel Award: Grete Scheidl

One of the main reasons for the Bloomies is to honor the unsung heroes of the club, those members who quietly form the backbone of so many committees: always there, always reliable, no stress, no drama, willing to fill every need. For many years, now, Avis Campbell Gardens has been the beneficiary of the cheer and generosity of spirit from this Bloomie

awardee. On a totally reliable basis, she uses her multitude of talents from cookery to cultivation to fill every need of our demanding jewel. Once president of the now-defunct North Caldwell Garden Club, today she supports our secret garden, sweetly providing bouquets for frazzled gardeners. She is our good fortune, and we are happy to award the Golden Trowel Bloomie to Grete Scheidl.

Bloomies — Rototiller Award: Peter Hirsch

You all know that Deb Hirsch is ubiquitous on the greenest of Montclair's streets, but you may not have noticed a man at her side with an English cap and an equally fluorescent vest. He struggles with hoses, pushes wheelbarrows, shovels mulch, and — most admirable of all — is the only person able to start and handle a rusty rented rototiller in impossibly hard ground, whether it's on the traffic circle or at the YMCA. Yes, this award is for our muscular friend, Peter Hirsch, Deborah's husband and helpmate, and quiet supporter of the Garden Club as well as so many other non-profits in Montclair.

Emerita and 35-Year Member: Jamie Chase

In this centennial year, we are proud to honor one of our most active and long-standing members. From the moment she joined the club in 1990, she brought boundless energy, generosity, and professional talent to everything she did. A certified landscape designer, she enriched both our club and the town through her creativity, leadership, and tireless service.

As Chair of the then Triangle Committee, she ordered and delivered the spring plantings every year, and helped transform Church Street, Park Street, and Bloomfield Avenue into flourishing public spaces, cajoling the township and merchants to assist with watering and heavy construction along the way. A dedicated presence at Avis, as bed designer and faithful worker, she freely shared her knowledge and encouragement with all who asked.

Though she now lives near her children and eight grandchildren, her warmth, optimism, and can-do spirit are still deeply missed. We are delighted to welcome our old friend Jamie Chase, visiting us here today from Virginia, as our newest Emerita and 35-year member.