

Vancouver Island Master Gardeners Association Report AGM - September 2017

The Vancouver Island Chapter is winding down after another busy volunteer season. The varied profiles of our events continue to reflect Vancouver Island Chapter's mix of both urban and rural communities north of the Malahat. The Victoria Chapter serves southern Vancouver Island.

VIMGA is divided into four service districts: ten members in the southern-most Cowichan Valley District represent 16%; 27 members in the largest Nanaimo District (which includes Gabriola Island) represent 44% of our volunteers. The Parksville/Qualicum/Nanose District hosts the next largest number, with 19 members representing 31%, and up in our North Island District stretching from Courtenay and the Comox Valley to Campbell River, six members represent 9%.

We have a presence at old fashioned harvest and farmer's markets, urban garden club and horticultural society meetings, club and church association plant sales, the traditional master gardener clinic tables at garden centres, and the digital world's addition of the Gardening Advice Line at Milner Gardens. This year VIMGA offered over 100 clinics and 20 garden advice parties as well as 49 plant information sessions at Milner's Advice Line. Given that we are 62 members with 57 active volunteers spread over approximately 250 km, we are obviously a travel-savvy as well as an enthusiastic group.

We have introduced two new venues of which we are very proud. This year, a group of MGs on Gabriola Island came up with a great solution for overcoming a small community's isolation by bringing VIMGA MGs directly into a neighbourhood's back yards, with friends gathering for advice on how to solve garden problems in their own homes through the newly minted Garden Advice Party event. This venue is not just for our island culture: many urban neighbourhoods are closely knit, and this venue has great potential to make the Master Gardener presence appreciated in what otherwise might be an isolated cultural enclave, a newly built development lacking a social core, or a once-established neighbourhood cut off from the rest of its original area by new thoroughfares and highway interchanges.

Now in its second year, the Gardening Advice Line at Milner Gardens and Woodland in Qualicum Beach has already become a valued source for gardening advice. Our MGs answer e-mails and phone queries, and solve problems presented by live specimen drop-offs. In addition, our writers have made the Plant Pick Articles in the Milner Garden's Newsletter their most popular item.

In communications, three items of note evolved. Our Web Committee continues to migrate all our volunteer reporting to electronic submissions, and the writing committees finished two important publications. The first is the newest edition of our Member Manual, which reflects not only our chapter's growth, but our culture's change to a digital world and the additional requirements of B.C.'s new *Society Act*. Second, the VIMGA Mentors Manual was ready just in time for our biennial intake of new students. This class of 15 has begun the Basic Training Program at Vancouver Island University. This winter we will finish updating the VIMGA bylaws to reflect the new *Society Act*.

At the end of this month the VIMGA executive and committee chairs will be attending strategic planning seminars so we can stay current with our beautiful island's shifting demographics and climate challenges as we promote the Master Gardener message. Then we'll all catch our breath for a few weeks, raking leaves and tucking our gardens in for the rainy seasons, to end our year in November with the AGM.

Submitted by Jo-Ann Canning
VIMGA Chapter Representative