



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Donna Nett-Heus

Class of 2018

Donna Nett-Heus has been gardening her whole life in one way or another. "One of my first summer jobs was working for Cheyenne Seed company and caring for their sunflower nursery. We recorded the pollination output, the genetics of that output, and then cross-pollinated the round set of experiments and repeated the process. For a bunch of high school students, we thought we were pretty darn cool."

As cool as that was, her grandmother's flowers were her real passion and inspiration.

"When I had my children, I wanted to grow our own fruits and vegetables. But as a working mom, I pretty much ended up with tomatoes, lettuce, and carrots. The flowers took a lot less time, so more and more of my garden became 'nonfunctional beauty.'" Donna said.

When not gardening, Donna teaches high school English in New Holstein. She is very active at her school advising, directing, or coaching the fall play, Student Council, forensics teams, poms, yearbook, and Student of the Year awards. She is a survivor of an ugly marriage and an even uglier divorce, and the mother of two children: Lucas, 27, a 2014 graduate of Notre Dame University is an accountant at Kapco in Grafton, Wisconsin; Emily, 24, is a student in Minneapolis and is putting herself through school as a highly innovative entrepreneur. Donna also has Lady Jane Grey, a proper American short-haired cat whose curiosity has gotten her into a number of awkward situations and Little Lucy, a chubby American short-haired domestic. Lucy just wants love.

What people may not know about Donna is that she is an architect by nature. "While studying it was not encouraged, I found a way to appease my passion: I designed my last home, I design and build units in my classroom, and I designed and built my garden."

Her garden is on what used to be a hay field. Her biggest challenge was fighting quack grass when establishing her garden. "I turned over 12-16 inches of every blasted inch of that 5,000 square foot garden. Pulling bucket loads of quack by their runners from my garden was therapeutic."

"My garden had evolved into a three-season bloom. I experimented and lost, but I also experimented and learned which plants survived in my soil with the sun and the accompanying plants. One of my favorite combinations is a green wall of pyramidal cedars in the background with three different magnolias blossoming in front of them, and a carpet of white daffodils or tulips (depending on the weather) in the foreground. Then by summer, my pink roses are blossoming in place of the magnolias. By fall, the pink chrysanthemums fill in between the roses, which may still be blossoming."

Her love of architectural design is evident in her garden. "I believe the most beautiful gardens balance hardscapes with softscapes (aka plants). Architectural details, as well as landscape design, can frame flowers, bunches of flowers, and whole scenes providing art from many different angles."

Gardens that have inspired her include The Royal Gardens in Hannover, Germany. She saw them while waiting for a ride, but returned to better take in the impeccable beauty. Travel is high on her wish list. She would like to voluntarily build with the Peace Corps. or Road Scholars. She'd also like to explore history and architecture. "Egypt is still on my bucket list. So is Ireland, just because I love tapping into my Irish spirit. I would also love to see the Nordic countries because they are very innovative architects."

Her most memorable vacation was a nine-day Mediterranean cruise during which she visited Venice, Istanbul, Greece, Sorrento, Rome, Florence, France, and Barcelona.

For now, Donna is proud to call the Fox Cities her home and being a part of the Outagamie Master Gardeners Association. "From the music and the theaters to the nature and the people, the Fox Valley is a great place to have landed. I am so grateful to the many friends I have made in these past three years."



written by Jill Van Den Eng

