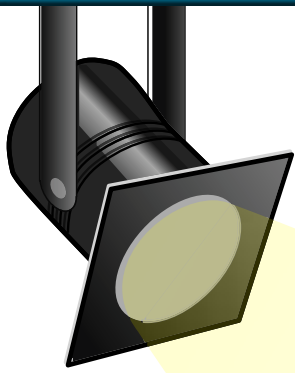


MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



RICH FISCHER Class of 2001



My affiliation with the Outagamie County Master Gardener Association began when I completed the Master Gardener training in 2001. Big thank you to Kevin Jarek, our class instructor for putting up with me! In those days the standard MG training consisted of speakers in Madison presenting a weekly topic that was presented state-wide to all UW Extension offices simultaneously using a big wooden "squawk box". We were also able to ask the Madison experts questions via the squawk box. Pretty high tech for the time! Ahh, the good old days. Often Kevin would have pity on us and put

the squawk box away after about 15 minutes and give us some more relevant training by flipping through transparencies on an overhead projector and by bringing in guest speakers. The OCMGA group was only about 30-40 members then; about 20 of us are still in our group today.

My interest in gardening and landscaping began in 1997 when

my wife Pat and I moved from Appleton to our rural property in the Town of Clayton. This property had two acres around the house that was pretty much a blank slate. The previous owner had nothing planted except lawn, a few hostas, and a cherry tree. There was also a tiny native elm tree growing by the house which I later moved to the horse pasture. The cherry and elm are both still alive and last year I inoculated the elm tree against Dutch elm disease; the tree is about 20-30 feet tall now. Over the years, we have planted many trees, shrubs and perennials.

I also enjoy planting the annual vegetable garden. We eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, but Pat is a wizard at canning and by fall our basement shelves are groaning under the bounty of V8 juice, salsa, applesauce, jams, canned fruit and other goodies. I am the benefactor of all that labor; that is reason number 285 that I love her.

Our property is ten acres in total with two acres around the house, four acres of horse pasture, four acres of swamp, a pond and an ephemeral creek. I planted a quarter acre prairie in the back lot in 2001. It looked very sad for the first ten years but has finally turned the corner and I am happy to say it looks pretty darn good now. A prairie is a long term commitment that will try your patience! Three years ago I started to grow a lazy man's prairie in the front yard. This is a quarter acre that I got sick of mowing. I did not meticulously prepare and seed the site like you're supposed to do; I just quit mowing the grass, transplanted native plugs and over-seeded the turf with native seeds that I collected from generous Wild Ones members. It is a work in progress, but I am happy to be going green; saving time and money while helping our environment. I have plenty of milkweed in the front prairie which support

our threatened monarch butterflies.

On a more personal note, I was born at St. Elizabeth's hospital in 1957 and still call Appleton my home. I graduated Fox Valley Technical College in the late 70's with an Associate Degree in Computer Information Systems and last year I graduated FVTC again, this time with a Technical Degree in Horticulture. I earned my second degree by taking one class at a time in the Horticulture program while working full time at Thrivent Financial. I retired from AAL/Thrivent last year after working 35 years in their Information Technology department.

My wife Pat also retired from Thrivent last year and we are both still acclimating to our new-found freedom. I have one son, Jimmy, who just got married in September, blessing us with a very lovely daughter-in-law. Jimmy's mom was my first wife, Ann, who sadly died of Multiple Sclerosis several years ago.

Aside from gardening, my hobbies are many and varied. I like fishing,

hunting, traveling, riding bicycle, riding motorcycle, walking, snow-shoeing, and making clay objects at Fired Earth Pottery. This past summer Pat and I took a 42 day road trip to Alaska; hiking, fishing, and site seeing. My most recent new endeavor was taking a Welding Metal Sculptures class at FVTC with Pat. We both made some interesting metal garden art and enjoyed the class immensely.

The OCMGA volunteer activities I most enjoy are the Appleton Farm Market Master Gardener information booth, First Thursdays at the WILD Center, Memorial Park Gardens and the Spring OCMGA plant sale. In addition, last March I taught a Tree and Shrub Pruning clinic at UW Fox Valley. I look forward to presenting this program again at our March OCMGA meeting. I love spending time with my OCMGA colleagues. I find the comradery of like-minded people and exchange of ideas keeps me engaged and continues to fuel my passion for all things green and growing.

