

THE ROSE GARDEN AT MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CREATING AN AMERICAN LANDMARK

Excerpts from a story by LeRoy Brady
American Rose Annual, American Rose Society

AMERICAN ROSARIANS have a fundamental desire to plant and encourage the planting of roses. As a rosarian and landscape architect, I was immediately interested when I got a call from an old friend saying the president of Mesa Community College wanted to meet with the Mesa East Valley Rose Society to discuss planting roses at the college.

Mesa Community College is an accredited public, two-year college with over 27,000 students. Its main campus was described in an architectural review of the campus as a set of show boxes surrounded by a sea of asphalt. The buildings, completed in the mid-to-late 1960s were all of similar design and the materials were so monotonous as to be boring. The existing landscape was basic, with trees and turf, but did little to add interest and excitement. The college president felt that roses, with their long growing season and color could help.

Studying the area, I began to visualize the possibilities: using free form design for curving rose beds, terrace areas for gatherings, seat walls for relaxation and even reading, and a curving wall to separate the area from the avenue traffic. . . . With fundraising underway and with active volunteer groups operating, we completed Phase One in less than two years and were ready to begin Phase Two – planting the roses.

The completion of Phase Two brought the rose plantings to about 5,000 roses. The new roses received for the garden included 'Veterans' Honor', 'Bronze Star', 'Silver Star', 'Purple Heart', 'Peace', 'Honor', and 'John F. Kennedy'. Garden Director Marylou Coffman suggested these roses be planted together in honor of veterans and the branches of the military they had served in honor of veterans and the branches of the military they had served in. Marylou, wife of Retired Lt. Colonel Glen Coffman, Army, felt so strongly that there should be an area of roses for veterans that I filed it away for future design ideas.

The idea was just too good and the recognition too important to be filed away for long. Soon, from planting these special roses in a bed of 50 or 60, the idea grew to a whole rose garden area of its own. The opportunity for an area devoted to the recognition of veterans presented itself as the garden development continued and planning for Phase Three began.



The interest of Glen and Marylou Coffman provided both ideas and information for the design of the Veterans' Rose Beds. They would be a living tribute to veterans and used for ceremonies in recognition of special days, such as Veterans' Day, Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. As the landscape architect, I visualized a garden area designed to recognize veterans of our great nation who have served, those who are serving and those who will serve in the future.

It was important that the design serve large groups of persons gathered for patriotic and other college ceremonies. Just as importantly, it should provide an area for individual contemplation and meditation. The college's support and assistance in gathering community contributions for the Veterans' Rose Beds is a reflection of their active support of veterans' programs and community involvement.

Nearly 1000 roses have been planted in the new beds, with room left for new varieties. The Veterans' Rose Beds are unique in design and plantings. The Garden includes five circular beds representing the five services, Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard, with the flag of each service located in each circle of 30 roses. A 20-foot by 80-foot oval stage area fronts the American, State and POW flagpoles. All flagpoles are lit so flags can be flown at night.

At present there are 51 rose varieties planted in the Veterans' Garden. All of the varieties have names that relate to the military, awards of distinction or of national and patriotic themes, presidents and individuals who have served, and of course, the original 'Peace' rose.

Meanwhile the Arizona Federation of Garden Clubs donated special funds earmarked for the construction of a Blue Star Memorial. Representatives from the City of Mesa, the college and the rose society joined with them to dedicate the Blue Star Memorial, along with a new bus shelter and pergola.

The final addition to the Veterans' Beds will be the "Honors Bed". It will honor those who have earned various state and national military honor medals, including the Congressional Medal of Honor. The beautiful white rose 'Honor' will be planted in this bed, located near the Blue Star Memorial.

Saturday, April 30th started as a normal day at the rose garden. Late in the afternoon, I stopped by the rose garden and saw a student making notes. As he approached, he said he was writing a story for a journalism class and asked if I would mind answering some questions. I told him yes, if he would walk with me as I was already late in visiting another garden. Returning to our vehicles, the student stopped at his car. I went on to mine.

There was a husky man in a Harley-Davidson tee shirt just a few feet behind us, who continued on to the second of the five circular beds commemorating the branches of the military. He stood in front of the service bed with the Marine Corps flag for several moments and then knelt down. After several minutes with his head bowed, he made the sign of the cross and stood up, gently wiping his eyes. He stayed there in an attitude of meditation, looking at the roses planted and blooming in honor of our veterans. It moved me to see that all of our work had such a real and meaningful effect on others.

As I drove by the journalism student, he asked if I had seen the other fellow, then said how great it was that the rose garden could provide a place of meaning for him to come to. Later, as I retold what I had witnessed, I realized that this day, April 30th, had special meaning for many veterans, perhaps including the fellow in the garden. April 30th, 1975, was the day we withdrew from the Viet Nam conflict.

There have and will be many more stories like this. This is why we love roses, love to grow them and love to share them. Doing so adds beauty and peace to our world.