

Mississauga's Rhododendron Gardens gets new name

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Dr. Joseph Brueckner (centre) spent years hybridizing rhododendrons for the Canadian climate, then donated his favourites to what became Rhododendron Gardens Park. Brueckner's name is now being added to the park's. Former City Councillors David Culham (left) and Harold Kennedy (right), who helped bring the project to life, show off the beauty of the blooms in this 1990 photo.

by Radhika Panjwani

The carpets of rhododendrons that colour Mississauga's civic garden in Port Credit were a labour of love for the late Dr. Joseph Brueckner, an avid gardener who became a legend of sorts.

The City has renamed Mississauga's Rhododendron Gardens, where Brueckner spent many hours nurturing and coaxing his favourite plants to bloom, The Brueckner Rhododendron Garden.

Meanwhile, City officials plan to install a plaque under a dogwood tree at the entrance of the garden to honour former City Councillor Harold Kennedy.

Kennedy is credited with turning Brueckner's dream for a rhododendron garden into reality.

The Brueckner Rhododendron Garden is located at 660 Lakeshore Rd. W. It's a waterfront garden park that was known as Cranberry Cove when it was acquired in 1975.

Brueckner, a physician who died in 1994, made Mississauga his home after his retirement, after arriving here from New Brunswick. He fell in love with rhododendrons during a stay in Switzerland and put his scientific mind to work breeding hardy varieties of the plant that would survive harsh Canadian winters.

Through hybridization, Brueckner registered some 18 varieties of rhododendrons with The Royal Horticultural Society. Some of the rare plants he bred include ?the bluenose? (violet blossoms) and ?igloo? (light pink buds opening to white blossoms). Brueckner was adamant his coveted shrubs be planted in a garden setting as opposed to a park.

"Joe wanted it to be a garden," Culham said. "Joe had the idea the rhododendrons would be a perfect backdrop to other flowers. They were magnificent when they bloomed (from May to June) and the rest of the time, the leaves would be there to complement the other flowers."

Brueckner's daughter Christina Woodward said both her parents love gardening. Mother Marta cultivated roses and rock garden plants. Woodward said their family home in Port Credit still houses about 600 rhododendrons.

"When my father was helping to build the Rhododendron Gardens, he was anxious to develop a garden for the enjoyment of the public," Woodward said. "He didn't just donate plants, he donated the science as well."

Woodward said she donated her father's extensive notes on hybridization to the University of Virginia a few years ago.

Brueckner's wife Marta, who lives in Port Credit, reminisced about how she and her husband would spend hours poring over the colour charts to establish the correct codes for the blooms they planned to breed.

"Some of the varieties of rhododendrons my husband created are still in existence in Europe," Marta said. "I'm happy they're naming the garden after him."