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Freedom Meadow

photo provided by Frisco Garden Club

## In Full Bloom

By Haley Shapley

**IT WAS THE EARLY 1930s** and the country was still mired in the Great Depression. Frisco was a small farming community with 730 or so residents and not much to do. At a time when there wasn't a lot to be excited about, Esther Warren had a vision: to make Frisco a little more beautiful.

And because there can never be too much beauty in the world, and maybe because getting out of the house was too good a deal to pass up, a few other ladies joined her, and together formed the Frisco Garden Club. It was a seed, just a small seed, but one that continues to bloom 75 years later.

In the early days, it was by invitation only, a compendium of the who's who women in Frisco. The first event was a chrysanthemum show in November, 1932 that drew 63 entries. By the time the club had their second show in 1937,

213 registered guests came from 10 towns.

It is that kind of growth that has become the marker of Frisco, and as the oldest service organization in town, the Garden Club has seen it all. While it may not be a large group — today it has around 40 members, which is the biggest it's ever been — the club has been an influential part of the community from the start.

Says current member Jane Whitledge, "It's always been a relatively small club, but in many ways, it's often the seed to a bigger idea."

### A SOCIAL CONNECTION

One day a month, Elisabeth Pink would dress up, fix her hair and paint her nails. It was the 1950s, and for that one day, the young mother had a respite from laundry and pets and crying children. The meetings were in members' homes, and all the very best china, crystal and silver was brought out for the occasion.

"It kept us ladies out of trouble; it gave us something to look forward to," says Ms. Pink. "It got me away from tending babies and [it got me] interacting with adults and using words with more than one syllable in them."

While the Frisco Garden Club is a group for learning and volunteering, it is also a social outlet, a chance for women (although there have been a few men over the years) to come together.

"It was a way for me to socialize, and I love growing flowers and rooting things and kind of playing in the dirt," says Ms. Pink. This social function was especially important in the club's earlier years when, as Ms. Pink puts it, "There wasn't anything else to do in town."

Though life got too busy in the mid-'60s and she had to leave the club, Ms. Pink still carries fond memories and keeps in touch.

"I'm friendly with all of them," she says. "A lot of members I still know and see all the time."



# frisco STYLE MAGAZINE



## CONTINUING EDUCATION

Pearl Morris loves bulbs. All bulbs. With any luck, more than 300 will bloom in her yard this spring. She joined in the 1950s, and has the distinction of being the current member who's been in the club the longest. She was drawn in by her love of pretty yards and vibrant flowers, and along with her passion for gardening, the friendships she's made and events she's participated in have resulted in a rewarding experience.

"We have programs of all types, programs on what trees to plant to draw birds, what type of plants to plant for the butterflies, and we're very conscious of Texas native plants that maintain and conserve the water," Ms. Morris says.

She still remembers when Frisco had 780 residents in 1949. Each year she has watched not only her bulbs bloom but the population of the city as well, to an astonishing 90,000 today.

A lot of things have changed over the years, but the Garden Club's core

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Vivian McCallum planting Eve's Necklace  
photo provided by Frisco Garden Club



mission remains the same: “We’ve tried to make plants be an inspiration to the city and to the people in the city,” says Ms. Morris.

#### A FAMILY AFFAIR

Shortly after Vivian McCallum moved back to Frisco in the '80s, 40 years after graduating from high school here, she joined the group when it was so small it was on the brink of extinction.

For Ms. McCallum, it was a great decision. “It’s a wonderful club. The women that are members are just outstanding citizens and we learn about gardening,” she says. “We have a lot of fun.”

Her membership is something of a family affair. Before she moved back to Frisco, Ms. McCallum’s mother and mother-in-law both belonged to the club, and her sister was a member as well.

“Our projects and purpose are still pretty much the same,” she says, but fortunately one thing that has changed is

the numbers. “At the time that I joined, most of the members were older. Now, we have a lot of young women in the club, which is going to keep it alive,” says Ms. McCallum.

#### MAKING A CONNECTION

One of those younger members is Jane Whitledge, who says she joined for “all the wrong reasons.” It was 1988, and she was a young mother new to Frisco. As a part-time journalist, her membership appealed to the club – who wouldn’t want more publicity? But Ms. Whitledge was a self-described “total brown thumb” and was wary. Not wanting to insult the ladies who asked her to join, she finally accepted on the third invitation, despite her lack of gardening know-how.

“I just never saw myself as being a garden club person,” says Ms. Whitledge. “I joined for all the wrong reasons, but it has come back to me a thousand-fold with friends, knowledge and a place in the community.”

#### CIVIC PRIDE

“The thing that appealed to me about the Frisco Garden Club when I joined is that it is more into the native planting of things and the civic involvement,” says Gay Worley, the current president.

Today she heads up a club that may be small, but is mighty. One of their newest ongoing volunteer projects is Freedom Meadow, which was dedicated on September 8, 2005, to the victims of terrorism. The club recently won a \$500 matching grant from the Principal Financial Group to maintain the area.

Other projects include Bicentennial Park, where they built a picnic shelter and planted trees, and the War Memorial, now in Frisco Commons, which was originally built in 1947 and continues to be updated.

Other proud traditions are Merry Main Street, which they established in 1990, and yearly observances for Memorial Day and Arbor Day.

As the club grows into the future, members are looking at a few modifications. One issue is that meetings are held over lunch during the week, excluding some people who may want to join.

“I really think we need to be looking at an educational club,” says Ms. Whitledge, who would like to see a nighttime group for women whose schedules don’t permit meeting during the day. “The club would be to learn about gardening, have interesting speakers, and if you want to participate in volunteer projects, you can as time permits.”

The first street markers and house numbers in town, a rest stop on Preston Road, crape myrtles all over, a citywide holiday celebration, memorials for heroes, landscaping by City Hall, planters on Main Street – it was all done by the Garden Club to make Frisco just a little more beautiful.

Founder Esther Warren is gone now, but the irises she planted still grow every year. Even a small seed can continue to bloom – for 75 years and beyond.

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*Haley Shapley is a freelance writer living in McKinney.*