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questions



FOR SANDY FLOWERS

Wander anywhere on the 57 acres of the Cathedral Close and chances are you'll bump into Sandy Flowers, scurrying about the gardens and grounds as Director of Grounds and Horticulture for the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation.

Together with her team of 13 full-time and two part-time employees, Flowers oversees the modern Garden of Eden and all of the challenges that come with it. Now in her fifth year with the Cathedral, she previously worked in private gardening and at the British Ambassador's Residence gardens. She grew up in nearby Fairfax County, Va.

SURELY WITH A NAME LIKE SANDY FLOWERS YOU WERE BORN TO WORK WITH PLANTS, NO?

I was not born with the name Flowers; I married into it. Perhaps I chose my husband for the name?

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE SPOT OF THE CATHEDRAL GROUNDS?

I have two: The Bishop's Garden lawn area, for its spaciousness surrounded by beautiful flowering borders, and the Olmsted Woods for a natural woodland to hear the birds and be at peace.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE PLANT, EITHER HERE AT THE CATHEDRAL OR SOMEWHERE ELSE?

Whichever one has my attention at the moment! I love them all for their individuality, diversity and the role they play in the overall tapestry of nature.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE ABOUT MAINTAINING 57 ACRES ON THE CLOSE?

Whatever needs to be done on one acre, needs to be done on all 57 acres at the same time. So, if one area needs water, they all need water. If one area needs weeding, they all need weeding. And so on for mowing, pruning, planting, mulching, leaf removal, snow removal, etc. The window of time to accomplish each task is limited and the amount of area to cover is large.

YOUR TEAM DOESN'T JUST DO PLANTING AND PRUNING, BUT ALSO SNOW REMOVAL AND OTHER JOBS. WHAT'S THE HARDEST JOB YOU'VE HANDLED AT THE CATHEDRAL?

The 14th hour in a day of hard physical labor of snow removal in miserable weather conditions is the hardest. You honestly don't think you can take one more step and you have the Pilgrim Steps yet to clear.

DO YOU TALK TO THE PLANTS?

Absolutely! And the insects, and the birds, and the tools. Occasionally even the people.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW YOUR TEAM INTERACTS WITH ALL HALLOWS GUILD?

We work very closely with the All Hallows Guild, especially the Garden Committee and the Flower Mart committees. They have been stewarding the gardens and grounds of the Close for over 100 years. Without their input of countless volunteer hours and fundraising efforts, we would not have the beautiful grounds that you see today.

Each year, the Garden Committee identifies several projects on the Cathedral Close to support with design, funds for materials, and sometimes outside contractors to make improvements. Our staff work with the Guild to provide horticulture knowledge, plant sourcing, and labor to plant and maintain the new plants. We also help with logistics and manpower for Flower Mart, which is a major fundraiser for All Hallows Guild.

DO YOU TAKE AWAY ANY SPIRITUAL LESSONS OR WISDOM FROM GETTING YOUR HANDS DIRTY IN GOD'S CREATION?

I am made humble. Gardening teaches patience. I learn to pay attention and nurture when and where I can. The results are up to God. It is impossible to garden without being constantly grateful for the amazing beauty of God's creation.

DO YOU HAVE ANY PRACTICAL TIPS FROM WORKING ON THE CLOSE THAT READERS COULD TAKE HOME TO THEIR OWN YARDS OR GARDENS?

Experiment! Don't be afraid to change areas of your garden that have overgrown or are not succeeding. Just because a landscape was there when you bought the house, doesn't mean it should stay there! More often than not, it needs updating. Use our gardens on the Close as learning laboratories to see how different plants look together, how large they get, etc. Ask our gardeners for the names of plants you like and what conditions they require. Come and volunteer in the gardens for hands-on experience!

ON COLD DAYS, IT MUST BE HARD TO WORK OUTSIDE, AND ON WARM SPRING DAYS, IT MUST BE EASY TO GET DISTRACTED BY THE BEAUTY AROUND YOU. HOW DO YOU STAY MOTIVATED?

With horticulture, you never stop observing, studying, learning, growing. Love of the beauty and infinite complexity of our living Earth keeps me motivated to put forth my best effort to help the gardens flourish.

OPPOSITE SANDY FLOWERS LEADS A 16-MEMBER TEAM THAT TENDS THE GARDENS AND GROUNDS OF THE CATHEDRAL CLOSE **PHOTO** D. THOMAS