

Catherine McGill, Nominated for 2nd Vice President

I have been nominated by the Haldimand Horticultural Society and accepted the nomination for the position of 2nd Vice President of the Ontario Horticultural Association.

I have always volunteered and am drawn to teaching opportunities. It started with my parents who hosted refugees, helping them to integrate them into our community. Growing up in an Air Force family we moved a lot, so talking to everyone and making new connections wherever we were living was my life – always “the new kid.” I have often felt like the odd duck, but a friendly one! I guess that is why I was more at home with animals. As a young teen I walked and groomed dogs and with my mom we showed our terriers in dog shows. I put on a welcoming face and learned everything I could from older competitors.



After high school I needed a “real” job and so off to George Brown College to learn to be a Chef. I liked eating and cooking for others so that was the route for me. After graduating I worked as a Chef for more than twenty-five years, but I learned that behind the scenes was not a place of love for me. It had always been working with animals.

I do not just have an interest, or passing fancy, once I decide, I am in 100%. I had taken horseback riding lessons all through public/high school and was smitten. I attended all the horse events and showed in all disciplines. I found a calling in retraining abused and thrown away horses, usually the last stop before the owner gave up. I loved it and learned everything I could at Humber College in the Equestrian Studies Program. I graduated and knew all about horses, feed, care, husbandry, and all forms of riding. I did not stop there. I went on to attend Seneca College in the Blacksmithing Program so I could continue to help my horses. I worked as a Smithy for twelve years.

If you are tallying up the years in each profession, I am either ancient or a liar! Nope, I did this at the same time. I would shoe horses in the evening and on weekends, cook during the day and look after my horses after work.

I met my husband of thirty-five years and was engaged six months later. He was not a horse lover, but he liked to eat! So, we had that in common. After a few years we got a farm, not just land but horse stables and we opened a boarding facility where I trained problem horses, taught riding to kids and adults, and held shows for the area. We showed our horses at events with our students, and we were winning at the provincial level! During the five years of running the stable we welcomed our first two children. I was working as a nanny to neighbors’ kids during the week and all the chores supporting a couple dozen horses on the property, as well as teaching and shoeing evenings and weekends.

You cannot live on a farm without being a gardener. At this time, my mom was unable to look after her extensive gardens, so I became my mom’s gardener as well. The dirt was creeping into my soul at this time. We moved off the farm and headed to Caledonia in 1987, to have our third child.

When we moved, I started a home cleaning and garden maintenance company. That was a balancing act until my kids were all in school. The cooking duties were all in aid of the local church, managing fund-raising dinners and other events with volunteers in the kitchen. I have been married for 35 years to my husband Peter, and we have a daughter and two sons.

I joined the Haldimand Horticultural Society in 1999 after attending with a neighbor, and I began volunteering with the society. I ended up becoming Vice President by the end of my first year. (I did mention I throw myself into something 100%!)

My first time being President was scary. I was used to being behind the scenes, not out front. That might have been a good thing as I was not conventional, so we tried new things, and it seemed to work. The society started growing and by the end of my term we were up to 250 members. Through the years I have held most positions on the board except for Treasurer. I have held all sorts of minor roles as well such as Speaker Chair, Plant Sale Manager, Secretary, Planting Chair, and all the other positions at some point.

We had a great Judge, Dawn Suter, doing our monthly competitions and she talked me into going to the Royal Botanical Gardens Horticultural Judging School. Three difficult years, but I did it and became a Judge! Many years later I was asked to step up and return as President, so again I was at the helm of this lovely society.

I participated in a number of events for District Six, which is where I was recruited as an Assistant District Director. A few years later, I was talked into the OHA Judging School with another three years of hard work. I have now earned my second Judging Badge.

So, I am an Assistant District Director for District Six, two badge holding Judge, running my business, mother of three but, apparently, I had free time. I was asked to be the District 6 Director! Crud, my husband is going to kill me!

I am the Past District Six Director, and I have held a variety of committee positions on the Provincial Board. I have worked on a variety of projects related to Judging for the association. I then became the Youth Chair where I revamped the program to allow more open classes in competitions. This was not just for Youth Clubs which seem to have helped with our participation at the convention. With the new laws for the protection of minors we had to rewrite the rules for all youth clubs, which were not popular, but it was necessary to bring the old rules up to date. When I retired from the position, I moved to the OHA Communications Committee where I took on a Facebook GardenOntario Page Administrator position and have expanded on our page and we are still going strong. We now have well over 100,000 members! The effort to monitor the page is a huge time commitment. We are so lucky to have a few OHA members who are dedicated to it and keep it going. I helped with the latest issue of the Vegetable Garden Journal which was a successful fundraiser for the association. That was a nice collaboration of many OHA past and current board members to get that project up and going. At every convention I volunteer my time to assist with a speaker for a specific topic, act as a judge, helping with the youth, or assisting with the Judging for Judges' Updates/Workshops

Through all my experiences since becoming a Judge, I have become a Speaker and Workshop Facilitator. I frequently add new topics and present over forty talks per year. I speak all over Ontario, primarily to Horticultural Society and Clubs. I retired from my paid positions two years ago and just volunteer, speak and conduct workshop now.

My front lawn is all garden, I am a huge fan of native plants, huge hater of invasives, can talk your ear off on perennials and one day design. I am currently enrolled in the Garden Clubs of Ontario Design School. While still on the Haldimand Executive, I am mostly involved in the Monthly Competitions. Our Seedy Saturday is the largest in Ontario and I run the kitchen, usually with vegan food options but this year added "normal" food, so the cooking degree is still at work. I conduct workshops which are always popular. For example, we create more than eighty holiday urns, wreaths, and such. We hope to add other workshops but that is yet to be finalized.

I find humor in the weirdest places and if you think about it, I have probably said it. I am very straightforward, and a no-nonsense talker and am straight shooter. I am excited for the opportunity to be the 2nd Vice President of the Ontario Horticultural Association.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine McGill,
Past District 6 Director