

The Oak Ridge Garden Club, Ruth Davis

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on November 1, 2011)

First let me correct an error in the most recent *Historically Speaking* column. The atom model that was moved from the Jackson Square area to the American Museum of Science and Energy is a Lithium atom model. Thanks to Hal Smith for his kind correction.

Next I would like to bring you an interview conducted by Wallace (Wally) Davis, son of Ruth Davis. I am very pleased that he did this interview at my request. Her perspective as a charter member is important to understanding the history of the garden club. She has been quite ill lately and I did not want to impose on her, but surely did want to include her in the development of the history of the club.

Wally said, "Ruth Davis moved to Oak Ridge with her late husband, Wallace Jr., son, Wallace III, and daughter, Adrienne, in 1948. A second daughter, Sharon, was born in Oak Ridge in 1953. During the past 63 years Ruth has been active in many organizations and volunteered her time helping others:

- Charter member of the Oak Ridge Garden Club
- Charter member of the Oak Ridge Miniature Enthusiasts
- Member of Altrusa, a civic women's organization
- The United Church where, until recently, she was a member of the Board
- A Girl Scout for 81 years, while in Oak Ridge she served as both troop leader and was on the staff as Regional Field Director
- Volunteered for many years, along with her husband, at the American Museum of Science and Energy
- Volunteered for many years at the National Health Care nursing home

"Ruth is the last charter member of the Oak Ridge Garden Club which had its first meeting on September 3, 1953. She has been one of the clubs active members and served in various capacities including president.

"Here are the interview questions from Wally and answers from his mom, Ruth Davis.

Q: Why did you join the club?

A: *Oak Ridge was established on the meadows of what was farmland. I wanted to make the town more beautiful.*

Q: Did the club have a particular goal?

A: *The club's initial goal was to beautify the landscape on strategic corners of the turnpike.*

Q: Do you recall any funny incidents related to the club?

A: *While we were maintaining gardens along the turnpike, we had trouble with people stealing the plants. I complained to the police and asked them to watch out for thieves. Not long after the complaint, I was working on the gardens and the police stopped to see what I was doing. They nearly arrested me before I convinced them that I was with the garden club.*

Q: At its height, how many members were there?

A: 64

Q: What club accomplishment makes you the proudest?

A: *Creation of the Emma Lee Spray Garden in Jackson Square (not Emily Spray as many people say). When we began work on this garden more than 50 years ago nothing was there but a huge pine tree. The garden was named after the departed wife of Wallace Spray who donated \$5,000 in her memory. The club maintains this garden without cost to the city through direct labor and a sale of plants every spring.*

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Note: The maple tree by the Pergola in the Emma Lee Spray Garden was planted in Ruth Davis's honor on the 50th anniversary of the OAK RIDGE GARDEN CLUB because of her long service and because she was a driving force for making the garden a reality.

Q: What do you think is the future of the Oak Ridge Garden Club?

A: *Keeping others aware of landscape gardening and continuing to help make Oak Ridge beautiful.*

Q: How is the club different today from the early days?

A: *We have more money because of an annual spring flower sale. This money is used to maintain the garden in Jackson Square.*

The Oak Ridge Garden Club has a long history of beautification of our city through the planting and maintenance of flower and shrub gardens at key locations. The dedication of these ladies to the task of gardening and the expertise that exists among the members is a source of pride for our city. Several of the members are experienced gardeners and even some are master garden flower show judges recognized as experts among their peers.

The garden club history will continue next week with a letter from the president of the club, Trish Jones.



Ruth Davis, last living charter member of the Oak Ridge Garden Club