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Retirement community becomes one with nature

Written by
Laura DePrado

Barton Arboretum and Nature Preserve of Medford Leas is a Continuing Care Retirement Community offering residential, healthcare services to older adults, on 200 plus acres of accessible public gardens

MEDFORD – Imagine your retirement environment. Is there any part of that environment where nature is included?

The Barton Arboretum and Nature Preserve of Medford Leas is a Continuing Care Retirement Community offering residential and healthcare services to older adults, on more than 200 acres of accessible public gardens.

Nature is everywhere and people are busy living in this unique space and place that offers visitors a diverse horticultural array of gardens, landscaped grounds, meadows, natural woodlands and wetlands, and one of the most extensive plant collections including native plants in all of South Jersey. The entire acreage of Medford Leas encompasses the Arboretum on two campuses. Medford Campus is 168 acres, and the Lumberton Campus is 88 acres. It is 18 miles from center city Philadelphia, one hour from Long Beach Island, and two hours from New York City.

The mission of the Arboretum is to promote the appreciation and knowledge of horticulture and to emphasize the importance of integrating nature into people's living, working and recreational environments. Additionally, the Arboretum strives to be a model for good land

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- The mission of the Arboretum is to promote the appreciation and knowledge of horticulture
- Estaugh, a Quaker-related, not-for-profit corporation, founded Medford Leas in 1971

stewardship by achieving greater ecological responsibility through biodiverse and sustainable practices. The Estaugh, a Quaker-related, not-for-profit corporation, founded Medford Leas in 1971 as a residential and healthcare community that is now home to 600 residents age 55 and older from all over the country.

As part of the mission, the Estaugh chose to create a community in harmony with nature. In 1981, the Estaugh Board, under the leadership of its president, Lewis W. Barton, along with Lois Forrest, then executive director of Medford Leas, and Paul W. Meyer, the F. Otto Haas director of the Morris Arboretum, designed the entire acreage as an arboretum.

“The atmosphere, the people, the open spaces is made up of one big family of 400 full- and part-time staff and over 600 residents,” as shared by Medford Leas, Jane Weston, director of development and community relations.

“We visited a couple of retirement communities in New England. When I saw the list of committees at Medford Leas, I knew this was the place to retire,” said resident Carol Neil.

There are more than 90 committees at Medford Leas, 20 of which are Horticulture. There are several committees, including Apiary, Birders, Nature Walks, Woodland Trails, Nature Library, Atrium Arrangements, Farm, and Courtyard Mapping. Neil leads the Trails Committee.

Resident Susan Dowling added, “I am the co-chair of the Farm Committee.”

I walked through several of the Courtyards with Susan and Carol. There are 30 courtyards, each with a themed garden in the center of resident homes in a quadrant, connected by open roof, and covered walkway. Each themed garden is a shared front lawn for each courtyard. Carol and Susan outpaced me as they went from space to space showing and sharing, full of energy, life, spirit, zeal for all things nature.

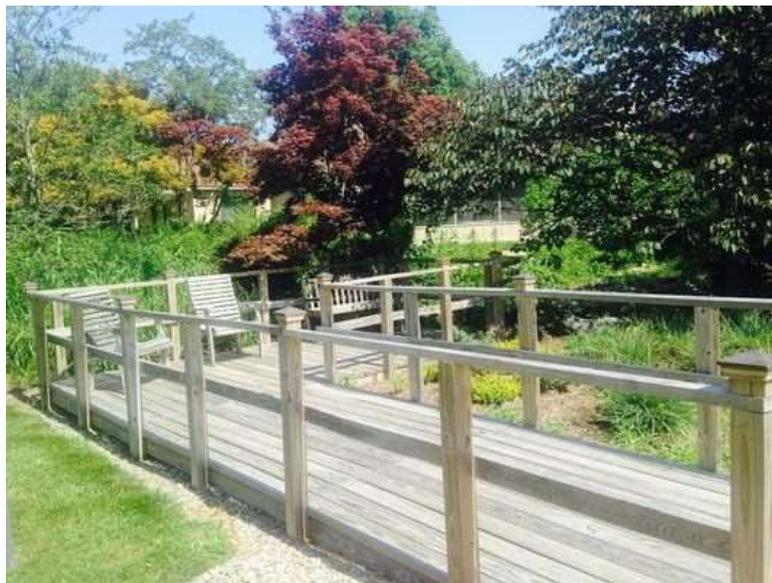
The Back Porch garden is in the healthcare area and was designed by my friend and colleague, Jack Carman, FASLA, owner of Design for Generations LLC, based in Medford and specializing in developing therapeutic outdoor garden environments. The garden serves the elders living within the Assisted Living and Skilled Nursing residences of the community. It was developed to help people maintain their lifelong connection to nature and the outdoor environment.

“When we are not connected to nature we lose touch, become disconnected, disengaged,” Carman said. “Nature-based research is growing and continues to show that exposure to nature lowers blood pressure, reduces stress, increases attention, creates a reduction in pain, and decreases agitation. Horticulture has been used as a therapeutic modality since ancient times. There is a growing body of literature supporting the theoretical therapeutic mechanism of nature on attention, stress and healing.”

Exploring, discovering, growing is what everyone at Medford Leas is busy doing. “Pathways to Learning” at Medford Leas are seasonal programs that started in 2012, and offer an array of opportunities to discover new interest, learn more about the world, and enjoy good company and interaction with other attendees. Pathways Program highlights this year have included the Native Plant Society of NJ Annual Meeting, Pruning Your Home Garden, Well Designed Photograph, Gardening Geru Series, and a A Visit to Chanticleer.

Additionally, members of Medford Leas include American Public Gardens Association, Garden State Gardens, Garden Club of NJ, and Greater Philadelphia Gardens. Medford Leas is a popular place for photo shoots for brides and a venue for a Saks Fifth Avenue fashion photo shoot in the early spring.

Individuals and small groups are welcome to visit the Arboretum at no charge. For information, contact Jane Weston, director of community relations, at janeweston@medfordleas.net or 609-654-3007. For information about the Barton Arboretum, visit www.bartonarboretum.org.



Eagle Scout Bridge Walkway. This deck, built as a component of an Eagle Scout project, overlooks Ober's Pond, named for the resident who lived near this area and developed the pond and garden. (Photo courtesy of Medford Leas)

Laura DePrado is a horticultural therapy practitioner and horticultural specialist:
Laura@finaltouchplantscaping.com, 908-872-8387, finaltouchplantscaping.com