

# T.O. gardens are a world away

## The 4.5-acre cultural oasis near arts plaza heads into 7th year

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Ventura County Star

Wednesday, April 9, 2008



Dana Rene Bowler / Star staff Simi Valley School student Cassie Johnson, left, actor Bruce Buonauro, portraying Father Junipero Serra, and student Drake Hartwell act out a scene based on the nine missions Father Serra helped build in 1750 in a program at Gardens of the World in Thousand Oaks recently. The history program is among those offered at the gardens.

In its initial years, 2,000 to 3,000 visits were recorded annually at the Gardens of the World, a 4.5-acre cultural oasis across from the Civic Arts Plaza in Thousand Oaks.

Now heading into its seventh year, the gardens draw about 10,000 visitors a year, according to Ed Hogan of the Hogan Family Foundation, which operates the gardens.

Authentically landscaped, the scenic monument on the city's major thoroughfare includes a California mission courtyard, a knoll-top bandstand for free summer concerts, and the Resource Center, in which artworks are displayed. Its floral vistas reflect England, France, Italy and Japan.

Steve Jones of Newbury Park and his wife, Karen, used to patronize the lumber yard that had at one time been part of the gardens' footprint. Gardeners themselves, the couple frequently bring visitors and stop in the Italian garden at a bench dedicated to Karen Jones' late parents, Janet and Richard Gullickson.

"It's just beautiful there," Steve Jones said.

Have the gardens evolved in the way Hogan envisioned?

"Yes, even more than we expected," Hogan said. "We wanted to complement the Civic Arts Plaza by introducing families to cultural events. Children get to visit and preview gardens that are found around the world to broaden their sights and imagination."

Travel pioneers Hogan and his wife, Lynn, of Lake Sherwood founded Pleasant Holidays before selling the successful enterprise, establishing the foundation and creating the gardens as a gift to the community.

"The Hogans wanted the gardens to be a destination," said gardens resident manager Marianne Coulson. "That's how it would bring dollars to this community."

An integral limb of the gardens' maturation is volunteer guides — 25 percent have been there for more than five years, and 77 percent for more than three years, said Coulson. She called the docent program "very successful" because it offers value: tranquil trails, quarterly workshops with speakers on topics such as photography and flower arranging, and a weekly socializing connection.

The 48 docents contributed 6,000 hours of service in 2007, and in the first quarter of 2008, racked up 1,300 hours.

"Beauty right in the middle of the city," said docent Sally Garcia of Newbury Park. At the gardens for four years, Garcia said she looks forward to her stint on Sunday afternoons because "it is fun."

Among the signature events at the gardens is a summertime jazz series and a California history program. Performer Bruce Buonauro dons the robes of Father Junipero Serra, founder of California's mission system, to bring alive that era of 225 years ago.

Since the gardens initiated the history program in 2003, more than 10,000 fourth-graders from 50 schools have seen history re-enacted.

Also at the gardens, more than 60 artists have exhibited works within its Resource Center.

"It's nice to support local artists" from Santa Barbara to Los Angeles, Coulson said. Each artist is asked to volunteer 15 percent of any sales proceeds to the charity of their choice, or donate back to the gardens.

This month, Evans Thomas is the featured artist, through May 11.

The Gardens of the World is at 2001 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd. Reservations are required for docent tours and any group visit, and nonprofit organizations seeking a fundraising venue are invited to inquire.

Gates are open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays; closed Mondays, most national holidays and during inclement weather.

Entry is free and on-site parking is limited to about 15 spaces behind the Resource Center.

More parking is available along Thousand Oaks Boulevard or across the street at the Civic Arts Plaza.

For more information, call 805-557-1135 or visit <http://gardensoftheworld.info>.