



FALL 2026

OUR MISSION is to enhance University City through artfully designed public gardens, community involvement, partnerships, and environmental education.



## Jesse Gilbertson Named New Executive Director

*Jesse, center  
right in gold  
shirt, with UCB  
volunteers at  
Centennial  
Commons*

U City in Bloom is pleased to announce that Jesse Gilbertson has assumed the position of Executive Director of UCB. Since 2013, Jesse has shown impressive leadership managing all our garden operations in his role as Director of Horticulture. He has worked closely with Judy Prange, retiring Executive Director, and our Board of Directors while building excellent relationships with our volunteers, our community, and the City of University City. He does everything from pulling weeds to designing new gardens, collaborating with partners, grant writing, project management, and overseeing UCB staff and volunteers. When Judy announced her retirement, Jesse was the obvious choice, and his promotion provided a seamless leadership transition.

*(con't inside)*



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## New Executive Director

Jesse's career began at the University of Missouri – Columbia where he majored in Plant Science and Horticulture and studied art. In the summer of 2000, an internship at Missouri Botanical Garden's Shaw Nature Reserve introduced him to ecological horticulture practices, woodland restoration, and a whole palette of native plants. Following his internship, the Botanical Garden hired him. While working, he learned all aspects of ornamental horticulture and honed his skills in garden design and pruning. Learning from MOBot's founder Henry Shaw's vision for public green spaces there, he decided he wanted to pursue a new calling in Forest Park, Saint Louis's most important public green space. As a Horticulturist at Forest Park Forever, he managed a large portion of the park's east side. His love of working with volunteers and the community led him to become certified as an interpretive guide and arborist.

Jesse has a deep love for green spaces, garden design and, especially, trees. He is a curator for about 80 world class bonsai trees, a passion for almost 30 years. Recently, he displayed bonsai at the US



National Bonsai show, hosted the MOBot garden tour at his home, and held a special tour for the North American Japanese Garden Association. His eye for design is evident not only in his bonsai trees but also in the many different styles of the gardens he manages for U City in Bloom. He believes in stewardship, not just maintenance, and he and his staff and volunteers practice this in our gardens. He encourages our staff to build meaningful relationships with the gardens they care for which then receive higher levels of care than typical landscapes.

We were fortunate that one of our Board members volunteered with Jesse in Forest Park. He recognized Jesse's skills, drive, and energy were rare and convinced him to come to UCB thirteen years ago. Besides the proficiencies Jesse has honed over the years, his personality made him an obvious choice to take over leadership of U City in Bloom. If you've run into him in our gardens, you know he always stops what he is doing to have a conversation. He enjoys sharing what he is working on, is funny, and personable. You quickly ascertain that he really cares about our community and the mission that U City in Bloom holds so dear.

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## Judy Prange Retires as Executive Director

When Judy Prange moved to University City in 1999, she lost little time in becoming active in her new community. By the turn of the millennium, she was on the Executive Committee planning the Centennial celebrations around the anniversary of the founding of University City in 1906. She joined the Board of the U. City Parks Foundation in 2008 (and later organized its celebration in 2023 of the 100th anniversary of the Parks Department, in her spare time). In 2010, she became a member of U City in Bloom's Board of Directors. Just four years afterwards, was leading UCB as its Executive Director.

At the time she became active in UCB, the organization was in the process of transitioning from its roots as a primarily volunteer organization to a non-profit organization with paid staff in addition to a core group of devoted volunteers. She replaced Mary Ann Shaw, one of the three founding members of UCB in 1984. To this day, Mary Ann remains an active Board member, along with co-founder Jane Schaefer. UCB volunteers and board members are very loyal!

She brought to her position her boundless energy and enthusiasm for all things U. City – its early history and the history of its civic buildings and diverse neighborhoods, its Public Schools, its Parks, and its citizens. At the time, U City in Bloom's primary fundraiser was its annual Spring Plant Sale. Having had experience with organizing events in our

community as well as other places, Judy recommended adding a Garden Tour. In addition to being a fundraiser, this biennial event became a means to show off our diverse neighborhoods, their beautiful private gardens, and demonstrate how guests could learn from UCB about best practices in gardening and environmental stewardship. Judy's favorite Garden Tour remains the 2023 "Music in the Gardens" event in the historic Musick subdivision which featured musicians performing in the gardens.

Judy worked collaboratively with the Board. At the suggestion of Board President Jack Breier, a volunteer with Forest Park's Flora Conservancy, Judy borrowed Flora's idea of preview sale party before its open sale the next day. UCB's popular Party with the Plants evening reception has added more profit to the already successful Plant Sale. And it is convivial and fun! Board member Jo Seltzer, who after a career as a scientist, turned to her love of plein air painting, gave Judy the idea of adding a Plein Air Festival and Competition to the Garden Tour event. Artists may be seen painting in many of the gardens and selling their creations at the evening reception afterwards. It's a win-win as artists may make a sale, and guests may take home a unique work of art depicting University City.

Like our founders Mary Ann and Jane, Judy plans to remain connected to U City in Bloom while taking a well-earned break from the day-to-day responsibilities of management. Thank you so much, Judy, for your service to U City in Bloom and all of University City!



Judy Prange, left, with Youth Art Judge, Adelia Parker-Castro, at a Plein Air reception.



Judy with Cuddles, unofficial mascot of U City in Bloom.

## Visual Noise

Jesse Gilbertson

We all live and work in an urban area full of noise. The sounds of the city are all around us compounding our stress and anxiety. The other morning, I was driving and I had my radio off and windows up and was enjoying the silence on my way to work. The silence only highlighted just how much was going on visually. Cars were dodging in and out, traffic lights were changing, people were up to all sorts of activities, colors and words blended on signs and I was registering it all at once while trying not to hit or be hit by speeding motorists. By the time I pulled up to our garden at Oakbrook and Delmar I was mentally exhausted and full of anxiety.

This garden is right next to one of the busiest streets in U City but as soon as I entered it I was surrounded by soft monochromatic greens and subtle colors of blossoms with the natural textures of different leaf forms. The change of heart rate and blood pressure was almost immediate. It was so calming I



decided to sit on the bench and recharge where I barely noticed the sounds of stressed drivers racing to wherever coming from Delmar. Studies have shown this to be true. Blood pressure and heart rate changes can be detected within minutes of exposure to more natural surroundings, and the stress hormone cortisol drops after 20 to 30 minutes. Imagine the long-term benefits of frequent visits to a calming garden.

Sure, you can read about the many benefits of green spaces such as that reduction of immune system damaging cortisol, but you are lucky to live in a city where you can experience those benefits immediately. Our gift and service to you and your community are beautiful gardens and trees in all the parks, along roadsides and medians and surrounding our civic buildings and schools in every part of

University City. You are always welcome to come and recharge, de-stress, and be inspired or just enjoy our many gardens.

## Reflecting Back

As the busiest time for U City in Bloom winds down with the arrival of fall, our gardens still offer striking palettes of color and texture from mature masses of annual flowers and fall perennials. Enjoy the slant of the autumn sun on a bench in one of them or just admire them as you pass by.

It has been a very successful year, with many new plans and initiatives taking shape for 2027.

The 2026 Spring Plant Sale was a fun and successful fundraising event. We recognize Dalene Tiers for her decades of work on the Plant Sale. She is retiring from her essential job

of identifying, labeling, and grooming the thousands of perennial plants that volunteers pot up for sale each spring. She and her husband Gerry, who is also a dedicated volunteer, promise to continue to help out on occasion. Thank you, Dalene, and Gerry too!



Dalene Tiers, right, with Linda Fried

The Plant Sale was enhanced by the ongoing participation of Brittany Woods Middle School students in the school's Sustainability class, and

volunteers from the High School. Dressed in bright aprons and yellow and black bee costumes, the "Brittany Bees" buzzed around helping customers



by holding plants for them while they shopped for more, then carrying their heavy purchases out to their cars. They also had a pop-up shop with delicious products from their gardens and hives, such as honey, jam, and fresh basil. UCB is helping our schools grow a new generation of environmentally aware citizens.

As summer began, almost 1,600 runners signed up for the 52nd Memorial Day Run, a 25% increase in participants over the previous year. Funds raised from the Plant Sale and the Memorial Day Run go to continue U City in Bloom's work.

As we enter a quieter time in the gardens, we look forward with great anticipation to exciting new projects – watch for more news on our social media and website!

## Legacy Giving

Donna Schwartz

We would be so appreciative of your naming our organization in your Estate planning documents. Under your Trust or Will, a charitable bequest could name UCB as a beneficiary in either a percentage or a specific dollar amount. If you wish to name UCB as a beneficiary under your IRA, simply request a beneficiary designation

form from your financial custodian and designate University City in Bloom as a beneficiary. Kindly include our tax ID (Tax ID 43-1540073) when naming UCB as a beneficiary under any document. Thank you in advance for this honor. Please note, UCB does not provide tax nor legal advice.



## Andy Steinkamp Joins UCB Staff



I'm excited to have joined the team at U City in Bloom! I took a roundabout way to a career in horticulture and continue to enjoy the journey. I started in the green industry at Urban Buds, a cut flower farm in Dutchtown, about 6 years ago. There I learned about cut flower care, urban farm management, and how to create beautiful floral arrangements. To expand my plant

knowledge, I enrolled in the Horticulture Program at STLCC-Meramec. My desire to be around all types of plants grew after working with a wide variety of cut flowers and learning more about the extensive range of ornamental plants and the fauna that utilize them.

Some of my preferred flowers for cutting are snapdragons, tuberose, strawflower, delphinium, lupine, stock, and dahlias. Perennial favorites include yarrow, bottle brush grass, prairie blazing star, celandine poppy, bleeding heart, and stone crop.

When not working, I love spending time with my family: my wife Teresa, our twins Madeline and Keller (11), Zip Zap the cat, and our dog, Pepper. I try to find time to hike, camp, and kayak as often as possible. Other hobbies I enjoy are woodworking, baking bread, and testing my abilities at home repairs and upgrades.



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## Ewald H. Winker, Jr. Memorial Garden



U City in Bloom and our University City partners lost a dear and valued friend with the passing of Ewald Winker, Jr. on March 1, 2025. Ewald served the City of University for over 40 years, retiring as Park Maintenance Superintendent in 2020. His help and support were invaluable to our organization. Whether it was delivering thousands of heavy pots from our Vernon

Nursery to the Heman Park Community Center for our Plant Sale, setting up bleachers and taking equipment out on the course for the Memorial Day Run, or any of the many, many other ways he made our lives and work easier, he always answered, "Sure, of course," when we asked for his assistance.



U City in Bloom and Friends of Ewald are dedicating a garden north of the Community Center in Ewald's memory. It will include a "magnolia walk," his favorite tree, additional plantings, and a bench. It will grow into a peaceful, beautiful space where visitors can reflect, remember, and celebrate a man whose work helped shape our community.

UCB and Friends of Ewald are seeking donations to complete and maintain this legacy garden honoring Ewald. You can contribute online at [ucityinbloom.org](https://ucityinbloom.org). Choose "make a tribute in honor of memory of someone" and enter Ewald's name when prompted.

You can also donate by a check payable to U City in Bloom with "Winker Memorial Garden" in the memo line and send it to U City in Bloom, P.O. Box 50283, St. Louis, MO 63105. Your contribution will go towards a plaque, the bench and plantings and care.





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## Grant Funds Return of Community Garden, Will Honor Norma Schecter

Jesse Gilbertson

U City in Bloom is pleased to announce that we have received a grant to bring back our long-lost community garden. This past spring we secured a grant from the Crawford Taylor Foundation to rebuild and expand our vegetable gardens at our base of operations on Vernon Avenue next to the University City Dog Park.

In past years, a benefit our last generation of volunteers had was a simple community garden space to grow vegetables at this site. UCB utilizes this space daily where we have the Mary Fahey Pavilion, our greenhouse, and a fenced yard with tool sheds, growing areas, and supplies. The decline of the original vegetable garden started with new neighbors. An army of groundhogs burrowing along



the riverway discovered our salad bar, stole veggies, and ripped up plants after tearing down the dividing garden fences. Most of our volunteers gave up. Then the pandemic hit followed by the destruction of our garden area by the devastating flood of 2022. Eleven inches of rain in just a couple of hours flooded the river, ruined our vehicles, damaged our sheds, and washed away the last remnants of a once productive space.

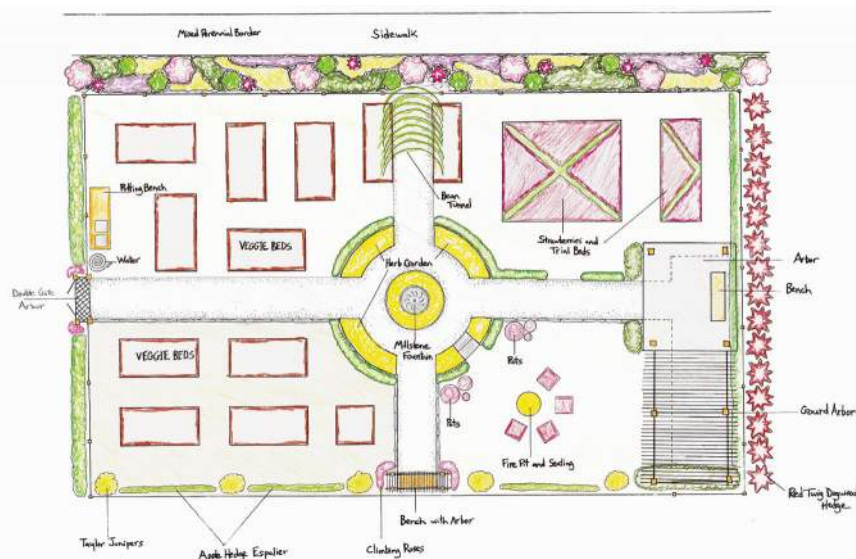
The new garden will be rebuilt with focused plan for use and longevity and an eye for curb appeal and will be situated right along the sidewalk in front of our greenhouse. This location will put it farther away from the challenges we faced so close to the river and give it a level, shade-free exposure for optimal vegetable growing. As the new Centennial Greenway is built on the Vernon corridor, this garden will complement the new streetscape.

After evaluating our vision for this space and our goals for its future use, we concluded that first and foremost is to once again provide a community garden space as a gesture of appreciation for our active volunteers. It will be a demonstration garden that we can use for education on food production, pollinators, and composting in an attractive setting. We plan to host school and community groups to tour and interact with and learn from this

garden. And it will give our volunteers and staff a place to practice, learn, and experiment with vegetable gardening. Many community gardens are completely utilitarian with beauty taking the back seat to usage leaving an impression of neglect. We will meet that

challenge head on with a focus on aesthetics.

The garden is designed on a formal axis and surrounded by an attractive, hand-built picket fence that will help to define, beautify, and protect the space from the local groundhog population. A millstone fountain will hold the center axis, adding sound and inviting birds and pollinators into the garden. The herb garden, comprised of four symmetrical beds, will surround the fountain



and be framed by dwarf boxwood hedges. Raised vegetable beds will surround this center garden axis. Between the garden and the greenhouse along the existing chain-link fence espaliered apple trees will be planted with evergreen elements to make a living wall between the two spaces. Hardscaped paths will ground the formal look of the garden and keep maintenance to a minimum. Benches at the east and south axis points will look to the fountain in the center with the southeast section of the garden as an open gathering place with a firepit and seating for volunteers. For the last major element, we will partner with a local builder to help erect a trellised arbor over the east bench to be used for growing gourds and grapes and to provide a shady escape from the sun.

Other amenities of this project will include permanent compost bins, a community board for local fliers and announcements and a free lending library for gardening books. Ornamental beds outside the fence will include a row of red-twig dogwoods cultivated to help us produce cut stems for our winter displays in the Delmar Loop planters.

Last year, we lost one of our longest serving volunteers and we want to dedicate this garden to her. Norma Schecter was a garden volunteer, a UCB Board member, and dear friend. She loved working on her vegetable plot before the flood took it. She served as the University City Forester for years. Norma, a dedicated runner who ran marathons around the world, also served on the Board of the Memorial Day Run, a fundraiser which supports UCB. This will be Norma's Garden. Thank you to the Crawford Taylor Foundation for helping us in our mission and for contributing to an attractive and useful space for growing not only plants but people and community.



U CITY IN BLOOM

# NatureScapers

News From the Woods  
Barbara Brain and Kathy Freese

U City in Bloom NatureScapers have been working on the Ruth Park Woods restoration project for five years now. We have helped maintain the Bird Habitat Garden at Centennial Commons for about the same amount of time. It has been both fun and educational working with Jesse, Christopher, and all of the volunteers as well as very satisfying seeing the gradual emergence of the woods from its blanket of invasive plants. I would love to know the exact amount of invasive material we've cut down so far. I'm sure it would be a mind boggling number!

We don't just remove unwanted plants, though. During the past five years, we have also planted hundreds of trees that are native to this part of the country, adapted to our weather and soil conditions and offer food and shelter to the creatures living or passing through the woods. These trees have come from Forest ReLeaf, a wonderful organization that makes free 3-gallon size trees available to nonprofit groups in order to increase the tree canopy. Kathy and I met while volunteering with Forest ReLeaf several years ago. <https://moreleaf.org/>



Since Ruth Park Woods is a woodland with an open canopy that allows light to reach the ground, we have also planted a variety of native flowering



perennials, grasses, and sedges in strategic locations. These plants are appreciated by us humans for their beauty while providing nectar, food, and shelter for pollinators and other wild creatures while also helping suppress the invasive plants we're working so hard to eradicate. If Ruth Park Woods was a true forest, it would have a closed canopy with insufficient light reaching the forest floor for perennials and grasses to thrive. The Missouri Department of Conservation has some good information on the differences

between forests and woodlands.

<https://mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/habitats/forests-woodlands>

As regular woods walkers will already have noticed, Jesse and Christopher have created several new trails over the years. Each of these trails opens up new areas so that visitors are able to explore and appreciate different parts of the woods. The new trails also give staff and volunteers easier access to areas containing dense stands of bush honeysuckle and Wintercreeper that would otherwise be difficult to remove. I believe the next five years will be truly transformational. Join us.



## Volunteer Groups

U City in Bloom welcomes groups of all sizes who are interested in opportunities to help beautify our community. Helping to improve our community through service is a wonderful way to involve your group members, employees or



neighbors in a positive and rewarding way while enjoying the out of doors.

For more information regarding group or corporate volunteering, please visit: [ucityinbloom.org/volunteers/groups/](https://ucityinbloom.org/volunteers/groups/).