



Pictured below, Heritage Museums & Gardens Board of Trustees members (from left) Charles Ritch, Tracy Isham, Thomas Rockwell, Cheryl Lilly, Louis Ricciardi and John Fulone, along with Heritage President & CEO Ellen Spear (in red) and State Senator Vinny deMacedo and Representative Randy Hunt (right), at the dedication ceremony for the Heritage parking garden.



COURTESY OF HERITAGE MUSEUMS & GARDENS



# somewhere OVER THE rainbow

**Heritage Museums & Gardens new ‘parking garden’  
is an oasis of sublime and purposeful design**

**BY HALEY COTE · PHOTOS COURTESY OF HORSLEY WITTEN GROUP UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED**

In 1939, “The Wizard of Oz” dazzled moviegoers with its use of Technicolor—the first time many had seen such an illuminating feat on the big screen. That awe-inspiring moment when Dorothy arrives in Oz is a feeling Ellen Spear and her team at Heritage Museums & Gardens set out to capture as they planned a new and improved parking lot—a “parking garden,” as Spear puts it—for the facility.

“We want people to have the same kind of experience when they drive into our front gate—that they are in a different place, in a different time, and that they’re surrounded by nature,” explains Spear, president and CEO of Heritage. “We also want people to begin their visit the moment they step out of their cars, thinking about the natural world and their connection to it, and seeing things differently.”

For the greater part of Heritage’s nearly 50 years as a public garden, the bleak, dirt-and-gravel-laden

main parking lot was out of character with Heritage itself, a 100-acre site boasting resplendent gardens and nature trails. In addition to lacking visual appeal, the lot also presented logistical and safety concerns. There were no signs directing visitors where to go, no walkways for those with motor challenges or children in strollers, and buses bringing in student tour groups could not access the main entrance (kids had to be dropped off in the middle of Shawme Road). “With that being our front door, we wanted to be able to send a message that Heritage is accessible and welcoming to all,” Spear says.

The new, two-and-a-half-acre parking garden—completed last spring—features over 180 parking spaces organized within three sections (Elm, Oak and Birch), a drop-off/pick-up ellipse, ADA-accessible walkways with native boulder walls around the perimeter, and directional signs. Given the highs and lows of the site’s topography (the high point is 20 feet



above the low points), incorporating green infrastructure within the new lot was another project goal. Horsley Witten Group, civil engineer and landscape architect on the project, designed a series of five bioretention basins.

Bioretention basins are shallow landscape depressions that facilitate stormwater management. Here they are designed to collect stormwater runoff and filter it into the lot's landscaping, all the while controlling sediment and debris to promote healthy plant growth. All but two of the basins can accommodate more than the water quality volume—i.e. stormwater runoff generated from everyday rain events that carry the majority of pollutants. "That's extremely rare, especially in a parking lot," says Brian Laverriere, landscape designer for Horsley Witten Group. "Normally you have



With over 8,000 perennials, 350 new flowering shrubs, and 50 new specimen trees, the parking garden is a horticultural feat.

underground storage chambers or recharge basins for excessive flood control. Most of these will happen above ground here, which is really phenomenal."

Paving the lot around the rain gardens and multitude of landscape beds that extend from the curbs and center islands presented a unique challenge. "It's not your typical parking lot with symmetrical, square, 90-degree edges," says Craig Trombly of Robert B. Our Company, general contractor on the project. "I can't say enough about Horsley Witten's plans. The way they tied in the existing contours with the proposed contours, there were no grading mistakes in the plans, and that's what helped us succeed to build the project."

"It was great to have a contractor who was capable," notes Joseph Longo, principal for Horsley Witten Group. "It came together quite well," he says, adding, "Once you get out of your car, you're in a garden."

With over 8,000 perennials, 350 new flowering shrubs, and 50 new specimen trees, the parking garden is a horticultural feat. "You could've exported an entire nursery, and we still wouldn't have had enough plants," says Laverriere. In executing the planting plan, Laverriere collaborated with D.C.-



The infrastructure within the bioretention basins of the parking garden are practically hidden from view when plantings are in bloom.

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based landscape architecture firm Oehme, van Sweden & Associates and Les Lutz, director of horticulture at Heritage. Robust evergreens, including blue hollies and umbrella pines, provide a visual screen from Shawme Road. An American elm, which will grow up to 90 feet tall, sits in the center of the ellipse surrounded by three white fringe trees, which will mature to about 20 feet. A fringe tree is also a feature inside of Heritage, with one prominently in front of the administration building.

Incorporating plantings and the aesthetic found within Heritage is a theme throughout the parking garden. "We ascribe to a new American landscape aesthetic, which is kind of the antithesis of the formal English garden, and our



Landscape beds of the parking garden feature a vast, colorful array of vegetation. Among the plantings seen above are Bloody Cranesbill, Prairie Dropseed, Finestem Needlegrass (a.k.a. Mexican Feathergrass), Blueflag, Black-eyed Susan, Beardtongue, and Heritage River Birch.

parking garden certainly echoes that," says Spear. "There's a lot of use, for instance, of hydrangeas, since we have the North American Hydrangea Test Garden here at Heritage." The "naturalistic" and "sophisticated" palette seen throughout Heritage is also on display in the parking garden, with pops of color, for instance, in the red coneflowers of the rain garden located in front of the main entrance.

As the planting installation neared completion, Laverriere recalls a bittersweet moment walking the grounds of the parking garden with Laura Swain, senior gardener at Heritage. "We talked about all the different cultivars and which plants live where. Laura was all excited because she was basically just getting started with her caregiving,

and I was at the in-between. It was like giving my baby to somebody," Laverriere recalls with a laugh. He says he still drives over to the parking garden from time to time to check on the landscaping.

As Dorothy famously says in "The Wizard of Oz," "There's no place like home," and there's certainly no place like the Heritage parking garden on Cape Cod. "We are so proud of our parking garden," Spear says, "because it proclaims that we are accessible and welcoming to everyone. And we think visitors will really feel that when they drive through the gates."

*Haley Cote is the assistant editor for Cape Cod Life Publications.*

The following businesses contributed to the design and construction of the Heritage Museums & Gardens parking garden:

CIVIL ENGINEERING:  
Horsley Witten Group

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE:  
Oehme, van Sweden & Associates  
& Horsley Witten Group

ARCHITECT:  
GWWO, Architects

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:  
Robert B. Our Company

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR:  
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