



*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 12, 2019*

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## **Garden Club of Virginia at 100 Steel Magnolias Mark a Milestone**

(RICHMOND, VA) – The women of the Garden Club of Virginia (GCV) have always had their own way of getting things done. Be it wielding axes against unsightly billboards or making tree tags to properly name (and save) every tree on Richmond’s Capitol Square, the results are the same – a greener, more beautiful Virginia for all to enjoy. Today, as concern for environmental issues builds, that mission is more important than ever before.

“This spring we begin a yearlong Centennial celebration, culminating on May 13, 2020, the day the GCV was founded,” Jean Gilpin, the President of the female-run organization shares. “We hope to bring attention to the public causes the Garden Club of Virginia has supported over the last century - the landscapes it has preserved - and to emphasize the importance of environmental engagement.” The non-profit might be uncomfortable with the term “girl power,” just as it shies away from the spotlight. But the story of the Garden Club of Virginia is colorful, courageous and impressive.

“The Garden Club of Virginia was instrumental in the founding of the Virginia State Park system in the 1920s,” notes Lynn McCashin, GCV Executive Director. “As our Centennial gift, we are giving the commonwealth \$500,000 in grants to support projects in the parks. This continues a tradition of championing state parks and protecting our natural landscapes.”

Missy Buckingham, Centennial Chairman, provides some background. “In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century there weren’t outlets for educated women to become politically active. They couldn’t vote yet. Some worked for suffrage. For others, the formation of garden clubs was a way to be impactful in their own back yards and communities. These women changed the landscape of our country,” Buckingham points out. Early in its formation, the Garden Club of Virginia prioritized its goals. Under the guidance of its first

committee, the Conservation & Beautification Committee, efforts led to the preservation of trees along Virginia's highways. "It's kind of incredible to think about now, but highways were a new concept. Nearly a hundred years ago, GCV members were interested in the protection of lands intersected by these roads," Gilpin further explains.

"The Garden Club of Virginia was among the first and the most ambitious groups to undertake landscape restoration projects," she notes. With the patience that tending a garden brings, the fledgling group had far-reaching vision. "Without organized protection of this irreplaceable inheritance, the Garden Club of Virginia foresaw the inevitable destruction of Virginia's unique beauty," Gilpin recounts.

Starting in 1929, they made it their most important work to preserve the state's historic public gardens. "From Monticello, Mount Vernon, Bacon's Castle, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, to the State Arboretum in Winchester, to name just a few – a full diversity of gardens is represented in the GCV's projects," McCashin shares.

Historic Garden Week proceeds continue to fund the ongoing restoration and preservation of nearly 50 of Virginia's historic public gardens and landscapes, and a research fellowship program that documents significant gardens. "Looking ahead to its Centennial in 2020, the Garden Club of Virginia sought a project that would be lasting and visible, statewide in its reach and unite member clubs in communities both large and small," Gilpin concludes. "It seemed appropriate that we should support Virginia State Parks again."

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*The Garden Club of Virginia celebrates the beauty of the land, conserves the gifts of nature and challenges future generations to build on this heritage. From eight founding clubs in 1920 to 47 clubs and 3,300 civic leaders currently, this vibrant organization seeks to preserve the beauty of Virginia for its citizens and visitors. Most notably, the Garden Club of Virginia is recognized for its largest public program, Historic Garden Week, taking place April 27 – May 4, 2019. It is expected to attract 26,000 visitors.*