

Plan would build improved rose gardens on South 27th Street

By Kendra Waltke | Lincoln Journal Star

Fundraising has begun on a new project in the 27th Street and Capitol Parkway area: The Lincoln Rose Society has started a \$350,000 campaign to re-create the Antelope Park Rose Garden.

To keep a rose beautiful, a gardener will “deadhead” its withered flowers, snipping off the musty blooms before they can go to seed.

The method plucks away the unsightliness and allows the plant’s resources to be used for future loveliness instead.

You could say the same principle applies to the Antelope Park Rose Garden at 27th and B streets, an aged beauty literally coming apart at the seams.

“It all needs to come out and new soil needs to be brought in,” said Normalee Stadler, president of the Lincoln Rose Society and co-chairperson of a \$350,000 campaign to re-create the Antelope Park Rose Garden.

“It’s been gradually deteriorating. And with the Sunken Gardens looking so nice, we thought across the street should look equally splendid,” Stadler said.

Vinyl siding around the beds is heaving and split, she said. Minerals from the pebbly paths leached into the soil over the years, changing its acidity and damaging the roses.

The too-narrow paths also cause heat stress to the roses and annoyance to people trying to navigate the beds.

And still vacant is the fountain that held “Cupid in Cigno,” a beloved marble statue destroyed by vandals last year.

But a new revival would correct all those things, reinvent the rose garden as a scenic spot that would show its history — and showcase Cupid’s new bronze successor.

Roses have been grown at the site for more than 60 years, said Mark Canney, parks planner with the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department, who designed the new rose garden with parks director Lynn Johnson.

The new garden will feature two separate sections that pay tribute to the garden’s 1940s beginnings, Canney said.

The first rose garden at 27th and B streets was a stylized, geometric classical garden, he said. It was called Goebel’s Rose Garden after Fred Goebel, Lincoln’s first parks floriculturist and designer of the Sunken Gardens.

In 1946, parks superintendent Ernst Herminghaus redesigned the space as an educational place to show roses best suited to Lincoln’s climate and test new varieties.

So, Canney said, the new design features a formal geometric garden and a more casual strolling area planted with native plants.

The formal space will feature topiaries, clipped boxwood and “rose lover’s roses,” Canney said — fancy cutting flowers and tea roses prized by the serious growers. It will have a swirling path with benches, sculptures, obelisks and side paths where viewers can stop.

“With the current garden, you feel like you’re being pushed down a hallway because there’s nowhere where you can pause and sit down,” Canney said.

"We wanted to fix that. We want you to stop and smell the roses."

At the heart of the formal space will be a 12-foot-across fountain with the new bronze statue: a fish-hugging cherub that parks staff affectionately call Fish Boy.

The formal area will have a new pavilion for climbing roses at its south end. An 80-foot wrought iron fence and formal gate will lie along 27th Street, giving the garden more curb appeal. Both will echo the garden's stylized rose motif.

The second part of the garden, a nod to the era of Herminghaus, will have a more backyard, casual look.

The new area will be similar to the current strolling garden, but it will have paved, handicapped-accessible paths rather than mulch.

The old formal garden will be pretty much demolished, and the new one would be raised from scratch. Some of the roses from the garden will be dug up and reused, Canney said, and memorial flowers and donor recognitions will be maintained or replanted with similar roses, he said.

Co-chairperson Stadler said the fundraising committee hopes work can begin in late summer or fall.

The campaign kicked off with a \$108,000 donation from Don Hamann, owner of Sartor Hamann Jewelers and "quite the good rose grower, too," Stadler said.

Some money raised will go into an endowment for long-term maintenance of the spot.

Committee member Chris Beutler said the plan to renovate the rose garden has been in the works for a few years.

"The idea was to integrate and beautify the whole area — Antelope Park, the zoo and the Sunken Gardens — as a kind of central park," Beutler said. "A central attractive area where families can go."

The Rose Garden helps the space appeal to different groups, Beutler said.

"When you're 70, you're not going to be running on the trail anymore," he said. "But you might want to stroll through the rose garden."

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