



DONNA COVAIS, Class of 2003 - LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD PROFILE

Respectfully submitted by Robilee Smith, EMG Volunteer-Northwest Chapter

Donna Covais is a certified Horticultural Therapist who ran her own florist's shop before completing the Extension Master Gardener's program in 2003. We are fortunate that she combined her skills and experience to develop a UVM EMG horticultural therapy project that serves seniors with memory loss and other special needs. For over a decade Donna has led this project with a team of dedicated EMGs at an adult day care program located in South Burlington that is run by UVM Health Network-Home & Hospice (formerly the VNA).

Every month before the pandemic Donna and her team provided horticultural therapy sessions to clients by engaging their senses in the creation of floral arrangements, wreaths, cornucopias and other horticultural delights for the participants to take home to their caretakers and loved ones. Each month's activities centered around a seasonal theme, such as St. Patrick's Day, Mother's Day, the 4th of July, etc. Donna skillfully led her team to engage clients' senses and she had a great talent for bringing out memories, stories, jokes and even songs from her participants.

The project's scope also includes managing a "Secret Garden" enclosed by walls and attached to the adult day care center. This allows clients to safely explore the outdoors – to see, smell and touch the flowers and taste the herbs and vegetables that the EMG team grows. The garden's produce is incorporated into on-site lunches and snacks – contributing *very* local organic ingredients to clients' meals. One of the highlights of the year is the summer garden party, where clients, staff and the EMG team gather to share a lunch in the garden.

Donna also brought the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) to Burlington for their annual convention in 2017. Donna and Charlie Nardozi shared the stage as keynote speakers.

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Chouinard, UVM EMG Program Support - Donna took the EMG Master Gardener course in 2003, and contributed over 1600 volunteer hours to the program. She received her Lifetime Achievement Gold Badge and Certificate in 2017. I had the pleasure of supporting Donna with organizing her annual Boxwood Tree Workshop she held at the UVM Horticultural Research Farm for several years, and enjoyed the one year that I attended and created my own boxwood tree. It was a lot of fun, and I enjoyed that tree on my dining room table for several months following the holidays. Sadly, we just learned that Donna passed away on December 7th, 2021. She will be missed dearly by the EMG program. Our thoughts and prayers are with Donna's husband, family & friends.

More memories and thoughts of Donna shared by EMG volunteers:

Donna's ever present smile and enthusiasm spread positive energy that was contagious. Donna will be missed.

Respectfully submitted by Lynn Gardner, EMG volunteer

Donna was such an inspiration, always filled with ideas for projects to share with the clients and visions for the gardens. She taught us well. I always think of her when I disinfect a pot or gardening tools, when the Geum she gave me a few years ago blossoms in the spring and the Bugbane she insisted I should plant in my shady garden – it's thriving! How she loved the garden's fresh vegetables and herbs. It is astounding how many and varied the gifts she gave us, has left us with. I truly hope the garden will continue to bloom and produce as a testament to her spirit. *Respectfully submitted by Sue Brown, EMG volunteer*

I am heartbroken. Donna was an inspiration, so very kind and caring. She'll be greatly missed by so many. I feel privileged to have known her. *Respectfully submitted by Wendy Savoie, EMG volunteer*

I only got to meet Donna twice, but she welcomed me immediately into the group. She was so kind hearted and such an advocate for all the patients at the facility. I am sad that I didn't get to know her better, but she led a wonderful group of women. In her memory, I hope to get to know all of you better and hear many fun and interesting stories about Donna.
Respectfully submitted by Joelyn Niggel, EMG volunteer



UVM Extension Master Gardeners

UVM EXTENSION MASTER GARDENERS THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2019



An Ode to the Loss of Memory

A flower tells the story about...

People and the way they once were.

Even though sometimes the details are much of a blur.

Looking at the petals are something they know.

But did I plant it or who made it grow?

That really doesn't matter when we cut them for a vase,

Our hands cutting and moving,

The comfort of ribbon, especially with lace.

How happy we are to share, work, talk

And bring home our treasure,

The feeling so important of satisfaction and pleasure.

This is the power of Horticultural Therapy,

Working like a medicine or pill...

Finally some choices and my own free will.

Plants not pills, so simple and true,

A garden and nature,

Their time has come due.

--Donna Covais

