

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Bob Coppernoll celebrates 30 years as Extension Master Gardener

"Never stop learning, because life never stops teaching." - Kirill Korshikov.

University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Bob Coppernoll is a shining example of this truth. Bob completed EMG training in 1992 after retiring from Caterpillar, Inc. as a computer programmer. He has enjoyed 30 years volunteering in the Peoria area and completing continuing education in horticulture.

"I have been able to build on my previous experiences and learn new skills," explained Bob. "I took a class on building Extension newsletters and helped with the Peoria County Master Gardener newsletter." Bob also helps his fellow EMGs report volunteer hours in the online system, as well as volunteering in the gardens at Illinois Central College.

"On Tuesday mornings when we arrive at ICC gardens, we know we will see Bob," stated EMG Jennifer Bass. "He always has a plan and ideas to share. He shares and assists in any way he can...from providing tools to teaching us new plants to inviting us to his home to learn more about the trees he has. He truly works to help all of us be the best we can."

When asked about some of the changes that have occurred over the years, Bob remembers the program being much smaller and less structured in the 1990s, with only about a dozen members in Peoria County. Today, Master Gardeners complete an extensive 60-hour curriculum specific to local climate, soils, and vegetation. There are currently more than 70 EMGs who reside in Peoria County.

One of the highlights from those early years was a live, radio call-in show on WMBD hosted by local Master Gardeners. Bob and his late wife, Lois (also a Master Gardener), were regular contributors. "It was fun. We never knew what questions we were going to get and there were some memorable ones!"

Some things have stood the test of time, such as the feeling of camaraderie felt within the group. Bob shared that his favorite part about the Master Gardener program has always been the social interaction. "It seems to me that every Master Gardener meeting results in meeting someone new and a new friendship formed," continued Bob.

Bob was recognized as a "State Outstanding Master Gardener" in 1996 and as a "Master Gardener Sustained Excellence" in 1999, an honor only bestowed upon 1-2% of active Master Gardeners in the state.

"To be recognized among a very talented and dedicated group of Master Gardeners illustrates the depth of Bob's contribution," explained Tara Heath, horticulture program coordinator. "We are so thankful for Bob and his many years of service."

As for the future, Bob says, "I don't plan on ever retiring from Master Gardening; it keeps me young. There are so many opportunities to learn and volunteer from home. I'd like to encourage more folks to do the same."

Bob lives in Chillicothe, and in addition to gardening, enjoys beekeeping and genealogy.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Bob Coppernoll invests a lot of volunteer time at Illinois Central College demonstration gardens. Having completed Master Gardener training in 1992, he is celebrating 30 years in the program.

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