

THE Acorn

Westlake garden club cruise takes members to see some of the world's greatest flowers

May 23, 2019

By Judie Graham-Bell
Special to The Acorn



ALL ABOARD—Mary Freed of the Westlake Village Garden Club boards the river ship AmaKristina on a recent spring cruise to see some of the world's most beautiful gardens in Holland and Belgium. Courtesy photo

A group of Westlake Village Garden Club members and friends enjoyed a spring they won't soon forget. They went on a river cruise and toured some of the most beautiful gardens and flower shows in Belgium and the Netherlands.

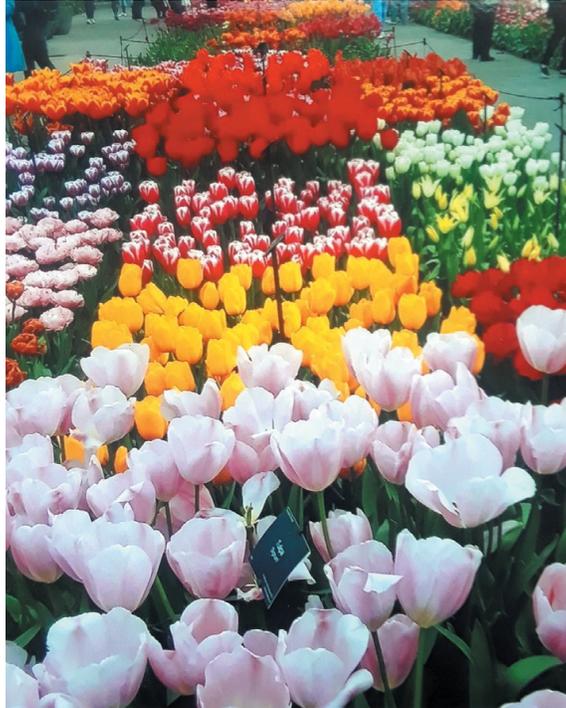
The Tulip Time River Cruise served as a fundraiser for the club's scholarship fund, and included first-time riverboat traveler Mary Freed, chair of the organization's scholarship program.

Transportation was provided by the 440-foot river ship AmaKristina, part of a worldwide fleet operated by the Calabasas-based AmaWaterways river cruising company.

While visiting one private tulip farm and meeting the family owners, club members were surprised to learn the farm lay on land reclaimed from the sea only 30 years ago.

Of special interest was Keukenhof Gardens, located near Amsterdam and celebrating its 70th anniversary this year.

Each year the gardens have a theme. This year's theme of "Flower Power—the Strength of Flowers" was featured in a mosaic that involved some 50,000 bulbs planted in two layers.



TULIPS GALORE—The colorful tulips of Keukenhof Gardens in the Netherlands stretch over many acres. The gardens are open only two months each spring. Courtesy of Mary Freed

Not only are there a total of seven-million bulbs planted over Keukenhof's 80 acres, but many beautiful trees were also in blossom during the garden club's visit. There was a lake with swans, of course a windmill, and three huge indoor pavilions featuring orchids, hyacinths, daffodils and roses.

On the trip the group discussed what was special about each garden they visited. Freed commented on "the amount of automation that is being used to harvest, process and bundle the bulbs."

Club member, Crystal Salapatras said she was delighted at how beautiful Amsterdam looked with its more than 80 special displays of tulips throughout the city.

In Belgium the garden lovers visited Floralia, an annual spring time flower show held in the 34-acre, 12th century castle of Bijgaarden, near Antwerp. They enjoyed a sip-and-sail cocktail hour while cruising by.

Flowers weren't the only attraction. The garden club also sampled warm waffles, delicious cheeses and Belgian chocolates. There were also chocolate-making classes and beer tastings.

Proud heritage

The Westlake Village Garden Club is celebrating its 50th year.

In 1969, a contingent of the Westlake Village Newcomers Club formed a special interest group that began to meet and share their mutual love of gardening. The Westlake Village Garden Club was later

formed and incorporated, and is today affiliated with the California, Pacific Region and National garden clubs.

The Westlake club supports a variety of philanthropic programs while promoting the love of gardening.

The April trip took on extra meaning because, for the first time in many years, the organization did not host its popular Westlake Village Garden Club tour.

“The river cruise fundraiser allowed us to continue our important scholarship program, which benefits students from local junior colleges, majoring in horticulture and/or environmental sciences,” garden club president Jean Reiley said.

The boat they were aboard, the AmaKristina, is named after AmaWaterways co-owner and executive vice president, Kristin Karst, a Westlake Village resident and garden club fan.

Judie Parr Graham-Bell is a member of the Westlake Village Garden Club. John Loesing contributed to this article.

IN A NUTSHELL

Keukenhof Gardens in the south Holland community of Lisse is only open six to eight weeks in the spring each year, and is considered to be the world’s greatest flower show.

Tulips were introduced to The Netherlands in the 16th Century, and Keukenhof’s historic garden section is home to many old plant varieties that date back centuries.

The gardens include three large indoor pavilions maintained by a team of 30 gardeners who primp, prune and pluck the foliage year-round.

Different sections include an English-inspired landscape area and a colorful Japanese country garden.