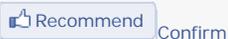


Mary and Al Schneider Healing Garden open to Seidman Cancer Center patients and the public (photo gallery)

Published: Wednesday, June 27, 2012, 2:02 PM



By **Roxanne Washington**, The Plain Dealer



You recommend <http://www.cleveland.com/insideout/ind>



CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Michael Gonzales can't stop smiling and can't say enough about the garden that he sees from the fifth-floor window of his room at **Seidman Cancer Center**, on the main campus of University Hospitals of Cleveland.

"It's just so beautiful," says the 37-year-old cancer center patient, who lives in Newbury Township. "It takes your mind off of everything else."

Gonzales is enthralled with the Mary and Al Schneider Healing Garden that abuts Seidman and is connected to the hospital at 11100 Euclid Ave. The garden is filled with well-thought-out elements that benefit the physical and emotional health of cancer patients and visiting family and friends.

The healing garden, which is about one-third of an acre, isn't visible from the street. A wall separates the setting from hectic Euclid Avenue. But the public, whether visiting Seidman or not, is welcome inside the garden, which is accessible from the intersection of Euclid and University Hospitals Drive. The garden entrance is on the east side of the driveway that leads up to the hospital's main doors.



[+ Enlarge](#)

[Lynn Ischay, The Plain Dealer](#)

Virginia Burt is the architect of the Mary and Al Schneider Healing garden outside University Hospitals' Seidman Cancer Center. She is framed by the Fractal Gate, an iron, wood and stained glass sculpture that serves as the garden's entryway. The carved wooden handles form a stylized heart at the center of the sculpture. The garden has a labyrinth, earth, air, fire and water representations and hundreds of plants.

[Mary and Al Schneider Healing Garden at Seidman Cancer Center gallery](#) (14 photos)



"This is open to the community," says Terry Koeth, a registered nurse and director of community and social programs at Seidman. "We would love to have people come in and feel the peace of this garden." It is open from 8 a.m. until dusk daily, year-round," she says.

The garden was designed by landscape architect Virginia Burt, whose company, Visionscapes, is in Burlington, Ontario. It's a gift from Cindy and Bob Schneider. In 2007, the couple donated \$2.75 million for the garden. His parents both died of cancer. Bob Schneider is the former owner of Patio Enclosures.

Burt visited the garden recently to explain the sights, sounds, structures and textures of the setting, all of which have specific meaning.

The garden opens with a low, swinging Fractal Gate that combines openwork iron, acrylic colored glass and carved wood handles. The handles, carved by local sculptor Norbert Koehn, are stylized hearts, and the wood is meant to bring warmth to the touch as soon as you enter.

A granite labyrinth is the heart of the garden. The spiral path is the same design as the one built in Chartres, France, about 900 years ago, explains a garden brochure. Since at least 4,000 B.C., humans have walked labyrinths to find calm and peace, and connect with something larger than themselves.

The labyrinth has three focal points, says Burt, who also designed gardens for the Gathering Place in Beachwood and Community Health Partners in Elyria. Initiation is the first step. Journey represents the turns taken to reach the center. Illumination is what you reach at the center, and leave your cares there.

"It is proven that walking a labyrinth at any age lowers one's heart rate and blood pressure," says Burt. "You can walk the labyrinth with a prayer or a problem or with joy in your heart. Anything you wish. This is cross-cultural. It's the belief that there is something greater than we are, and this helps you tap into that."

A rose, the ancient symbol of enlightenment, is at the center of the labyrinth. Once walkers feel like they have resolved an issue, they retrace their steps outward.

Visitors can walk the labyrinth alone, or guided walks are available.

The path around the labyrinth has large sculptures that represent earth, air, fire and water.

"Fire" was inspired by lava Burt saw during a trip to Kauai, Hawaii.

"I wrote down an intention for the garden as a 'place for inspiration, rejuvenation and loving,' " says Burt. She burned the piece of paper, leaving the edges. She traced the edges to make a 24-inch diameter template and cast that in bronze to make what look like rings of fire. Orange lighting symbolizes flames.

"Water" is a flat, shallow, dancing reflective pool that visitors can dip their toes in, and it's wheelchair accessible. It also gives off a mist, and there's another mister at the opening of the garden.

"Earth" is a 6-ton polished granite boulder, smooth to the touch and carved into a seat that's about the size of a love seat.

Preview

Mary and Al Schneider Healing Garden with a walking labyrinth

What: Garden outside of the Seidman Cancer Center at University Hospitals Case Medical Center of Cleveland, 11100 Euclid Ave.

When: Open from 8 a.m. until dusk all year.

Walks: Self-guided labyrinth walks 365 days a year. Guided walks 7:30-8 a.m. Tuesdays and 4-4:30 p.m. Fridays. Call 216-286-4636 or email melissa.ogrady@uhhospitals.org.

Tickets: Free admission, but will have to pay for parking.

Wind and breezes stir the "Air" structure, a tall, colorful double helix of disks.

The garden was planned with input from cancer survivors, their families, staff, physicians, caregivers, volunteers and management. Among other suggestions, survivors and families said they wanted the garden to include a symbol of strength.

"People said they wanted to feel the close strength of rock," says Burt.

There are two granite seats, back to back, one in the sun and one in the shade. Other rocks are smooth enough on top to sit on.

Plantings, which are in the hundreds, are a blend of soft ground covers, bright flowers, ornamental grasses, shrubs and trees with unusual bark. About 75 percent of the plantings are native to this area, says Burt.

Special lighting draws the eye to landscapes and sculptures, and a rainbow of colors washes against the inside walls of the garden.

The path that winds around the labyrinth and through the garden includes bluestone slabs etched with inspirational sayings, such as, "A garden is a delight to the eye and a solace for the soul," by Sadi, a Persian poet who died in 1291.

Robynn Knarr, a cancer patient who was a member of the UH Seidman Cancer Patient and Family Advisory Council, wrote for the brochure, "The many shapes and sounds and textures cause a mesmerizing peacefulness to wash over you as you wander round and round, to and fro, as though saying, 'Let go, let go.' "

There are benches for patients and visitors and, on a lower level of the garden, table and chair groupings for friends and family who want to gather.

The garden is four-season, says Burt. A snow-melting system under the labyrinth and the garden path ensures year-round use and safety. What's more, trees have winter interest, such as unusual bark and branch structure.

Outpatient radiation and chemotherapy patients get a different view of the garden from the inside. Outpatient chemo patients in the Gellar Terrace, while being treated, see a small hill filled with ornamental grasses, purple coneflowers and the like.

The radiation area is covered with a green roof, which is a thick, clear, waterproof roof with plants thriving on the top.

The Schneiders watched the garden grow from the drawing stages to the implementation. But they weren't prepared for what the garden has become.

"It exceeded our expectations," says Bob, adding that he and Cindy have visited the garden at least a dozen times. "In the beginning, we knew it would be nice, but now we're thrilled with it."

Landscape architect Virginia Burt worked with other specialists, including local talent, in areas ranging from sketching the garden to electrical and landscaping details to create the Mary & Al Schneider Healing Garden. They include:

- Cawrse & Associates Landscape Architects and Land Planners in Chagrin Falls, who did the working drawings.
- Art & Science Lighting Design in Cleveland. This company designed the lighting for the whole garden except the fountain. Red, green and blue lights illuminate the garden wall at night, and trees also are highlighted with special lighting.
- Fredrick, Fredrick & Heller, mechanical and electrical engineers in Broadview Heights.

- Hetman Engineering in North Royalton.
- MCM Co. Inc., a real estate, owner's representative and project manager-firm in Cleveland.
- Michael Benza & Associates Inc., civil engineering and surveying firm in Brecksville.
- Royal Landscape Inc. in Cleveland.
- Norbert Koehn, stone and wood sculptor who created the touchable wood hearts at the garden's entry gate.

Related topics: [schneider-healing-garden](#), [virginia-burt](#)