

## **Sonja Sommers Milbourn**

### **Remarks Regarding 6/12/22 Garden Tours**

I want to begin my remarks with a huge thank you to the El Dorado Main Street organization for the beautiful Garden Tour on June 12.

Each garden offered a unique perspective – from a cool shady oasis to a formal English Garden style to one attracting and supporting butterflies to a Sculpture Garden Artscape with native grasses, wildflowers, and limestone sculptures.

The countless hours homeowners invested in presenting their beautiful gardens was immeasurable, and I personally want to thank them so much for the visual feast for the eye. Such a treat!

In particular I want to comment on the unique perspective and potential opportunities the Sculpture Garden offers our community and residents.

For those needing clarification, the Sculpture Garden Artscape is open to the community from a W. Central Ave. entrance – marked most notably by a beautiful limestone rock sculpture with a large hole carved in the middle. The artist Tobin Rupe named this piece “Eye on the Prairie” - and that is quite fitting as the visitor can walk through the nearby gate into a landscape most often only viewed from the window of one’s car while driving through the rolling pastures of wildflowers and waves of tall grass in the Tall Grass Prairie.

Ironically, just the evening before my husband and I had attended our favorite event each year, Symphony in the Flinthills.

Prior to hearing the Symphony play, we enjoyed the “Tent Talks”. Specifically, our local treasure Jim Hoy - historian, University professor, cowboy poet, and author. Jim is a lifetime supporter of the prairie, and delights many an audience with his stories of his life on the prairie.

In addition we were quite impressed by the talk given by Gail Fuller on regenerative agriculture - which for me included a much smaller scale gardening. Their talks and once again experiencing the Tall Grass Prairie in all its glory was the perfect segue to the next day’s garden tour in our city.

So many people yearn to be in nature, to reconnect with it, to introduce their children and grandchildren to it. To try their hands at growing their own food, to educate themselves on the Soil Food Web, etc.

The Prairie and Sculpture Project, accessed off W. Central Ave., offers countless opportunities to do just that. Homeowners Judie & Peter Storandt have dedicated themselves to creating a large natural space to provide ecological, therapeutic and educational opportunities for visitors.

What an absolute treasure - and at no cost.

Let me just peak your interest with a few scenarios using this prairie landscape.

- ✓ School children with access within walking distance to the prairie garden could learn across-the-curriculum concepts in science, math, language arts, and health.
- ✓ Students at our local college could earn scholarships and internship opportunities while pursuing careers in Botany and Biology.
- ✓ On their lunch break area employees could walk the paths at the Sculpture Garden.
- ✓ Family members of patients at our local hospital could find peace, tranquility and artistic beauty in a short walk from Susan B. Allen Memorial Hospital.
- ✓ Visual artists, painters, photographers, sculptures, weavers visit the Sculpture Garden for inspiration in creating their art.
- ✓ Intergenerational activities between senior citizens and young children.
- ✓ The imagination of a child seeing the prairie garden with their family could be sparked, leading her to pursue a career in later life in environmental protection.
- ✓ A YMCA class could enjoy yoga in the serene beauty of a prairie garden.
- ✓ A High School math class could design and figure the measurements for planting an area as a prairie garden.
- ✓ A book group reading books themed around nature could meet to discuss their book.
- ✓ People on vacation could note in an Internet search such as Trip Advisor that El Dorado is noted for an exquisite sculpture and wildlife garden.
- ✓ Science and history students could get an up close and personal experience of the roots of the one of the most important ecosystems in North America. In a side note on that is, from the National Park Service on March 5, 2022, a quote: "Tall Grass Prairie once covered over 170 million acres in North America. Today, less than 4 % remains."

The Sculpture Garden with wildflowers - accessible by the Central Ave. entrance in El Dorado - offers people of all ages opportunities to have up close and personal experiences enjoying native prairie grasses and wildflowers. I sincerely hope city leaders and residents will throw their full support behind the treasure our community has in the Sculpture Garden.