

# One of Us: Jacksonville's Jan Sillik determined to change image of garden clubs

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BRUCE LIPSKY/The Times-Union

Jan Sillik was recently installed as president of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs. Jan Sillik understands that there are people who think garden clubs are vestiges of another time.

"I know people think of us as little old ladies in tennis shoes," said Sillik, who was installed president of the 14,500-member Florida Federation of Gardens Club in April. Sillik, who joined the Garden Club of Jacksonville in 1985 and has worked her way up through the leadership ranks, is determined to change that.

"These are not the old days of gloves and hats and high teas," Sillik said.

A major goal over her two-year term as state president will be to grow membership by attracting younger members. That means more night and weekend meetings to accommodate those who work during the day and more couples meetings to make gardening a family affair.

"We want young people to come in with fresh ideas," said Sillik, 67.

It also means a new emphasis on social media, said Sillik, who helped develop the Florida Federation's website in the early 2000s and served as internet director for six years.

Sillik, 67, grew up in Northeast Florida, graduating from Baldwin High School. After attending Stetson University, she spent two decades working in the retail industry in Jacksonville, as a buyer, salesperson and copywriter.

She has one child, a son who is a teacher at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, and one grandchild.

Her garden club career began when she joined the Montbretia Circle of the Garden Club of Jacksonville in 1985. In Jacksonville, the garden club consists of 41 circles with 981 members. That's down from the days when the club was the largest in the world with 5,000 members, Sillik said.

She took her first leadership role when she became Jacksonville's chairman of Garden Therapy in 1987. She moved into state leadership ranks in 2001 and from 2005 through 2011 rose through the vice-presidential ranks.

In her inaugural address, which she gave in April, Sillik told club members that garden clubs "stand at a crossroads," and must use education, youth programs and recruitment to rebuild membership. She called her talk "A Time to Know, Sow and Grow."

"We're a force for good in the community," Sillik said. "We were green before green was cool. I just wish people would give us a chance."

Anyone interested in joining the Garden Club of Jacksonville or learning more about it should call (904) 355-4224 or go to [www.gardenclubofjacksonville.org](http://www.gardenclubofjacksonville.org).