



2019 Walks of Life Honoree

Charlene "Char" Crowley

Charlene "Char" Crowley volunteered in Cleveland's Irish Cultural Garden on seasonal "clean-up" crews throughout the 1990s. She'd been enlisted as a parent volunteer by Irish dancing teacher Sheila Murphy Crawford, whose family and dancing school had taken responsibility for maintaining the garden for many years. Char had a deeper interest in the garden than most of her fellow parents, however. She was a landscape designer by profession.

Char knew that the Irish Cultural Garden had originally been designed by noted Cleveland landscape architect A. Donald Gray and that Clare Lederer, who wrote a history of Cleveland's unique Cultural Gardens, had hailed the Irish Garden as the "Greenest of the Gardens." Char went on a mission to locate the original plans for the garden, finding them in the archives at Cleveland City Hall in 1996.

When Cleveland industrialist and philanthropist Edward Crawford spearheaded fundraising for a complete renovation of the Irish Garden in 2007, Char immediately came on board. She was honored to work alongside landscape architect Jim McKnight to restore the Irish garden using Donald Gray's original plan. Char was project manager during the construction of the Writer's Recognition Court and the Lennon Fountain Plaza as well as the planting of an Allee of Trees leading into the garden. She has recruited a volunteer crew to maintain the garden three or four times a year under her expert guidance.

Char found her way to the landscape industry after studying Fine Arts at Kent State University, with additional training in Landscape Horticulture & Design at Cleveland State University. She likes to think of landscape design as a three-dimensional art form. Now in her 42nd season, she got her start by working for her father in 1977 and shifted to retail garden management while living in Indiana. Since moving back to Cleveland in 1988, she has worked with several area firms. For the past 13 years she has been designing, primarily residential landscapes, for Eastside Landscaping Inc. in South Euclid. Eastside Landscaping earned a Landscape Enhancement Award from The Ohio Landscape Association in 2013, for Char's work on the design and construction of additions to the Irish Cultural Garden.

Char was born in Syracuse, New York. Her mother lived in Tipperary Hill there, which boasts the only traffic light in the U.S. with an upside-down color sequence -- a tribute to the city's Irish neighborhood. Her family moved to Cleveland in 1960, when her father took a job as a comptroller with Chase Brass and Copper Company in Euclid. She and 3 brothers and a sister attended St. Felicitas grade school, and she went to Regina High School.

As an adult Char learned ceili dancing with the Murphy school and introduced her only daughter Hannah to Irish dancing. Their shared involvement in Irish dancing led Char to the Irish Cultural Garden. Her daughter, now Hannah Combs, lives in Boulder, Colorado, with her husband Nicklaus. Char resides in Shaker Heights. Char's bucket list includes visiting some of the gardens featured by Rae Spencer Jones in the book *1001 Gardens You Must See Before You Die*.

2019 Walks of Life Award of the Irish American Archives Society, Cleveland OH.