



PARK CITY IN BLOOM

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIA BARNDT,
PARK CITY'S LANDSCAPE GARDENER

Park City Municipal Corporation: How long have you been the city's landscape gardener?

Maria Barndt: I was hired in 1981 as a seasonal employee for the golf course. In 1983, they created the position of landscape gardener, and I applied for it. This marks my thirty-third year in the job.

PCMC: How did you develop your interest in horticulture? Do you have any formal training?

MB: I guess it just comes naturally to me. I have a love of the outdoors and wanted a job working outside. I became a master gardener in 1985—learning from the best: Larry Sagers of Utah State Extension Service. But I learned most of what I know through on-the-job training.

PCMC: How have the city's landscaped spaces changed since you first took the job?

MB: Thirty-five years ago, the town looked pretty different. At that time we only had City Park, the cemetery, and a few landscaped parks: Helen's Hill (which was across from

Squatters Restaurant), the Sixth Street park, City Hall (when it was located on Main Street), and the Prospector buffer strip. The city moved Miner's Hospital to its current location, and in 1982 Jennifer Harrington, the city's landscape architect at the time, contracted out the landscaping for the space. But the city needed someone to maintain it, so turning this into the city's heart was my first big project.

“WE WANT VISITORS TO HAVE A LASTING FIRST IMPRESSION.”

PCMC: How many acres are you responsible for?

MB: The Parks Department takes care of over 100 acres (not counting city-owned open space). This includes 57 landscapes: parks, buffer strips, city-owned buildings, the cemetery, playing fields, median strips, and playgrounds.

PCMC: Even though we have a relatively short growing season in the mountains, you are busy year-round.

MB: Yes, keeping the town looking pretty is a lot of work, and a full time job. I take care of the banners on Main Street (we change them out about fifteen times a year), the holiday lighting, and interior plants. I also design the



hanging baskets and planters for the city and help keep our city a “Tree City.” (This is an Arbor Day Foundation program that Park City has participated in for 23 years.) Whenever a new capital project comes online (the library, Main Street, Park Avenue beautification), I work with city staff on the landscape plan.

PCMC: What do you do during each of the four seasons?

MB: Spring is our clean-up month. In June we install all of the hanging baskets and plant our annuals. Over the summer (June through September), we weed, plant, weed, and weed some more. We also install banners and plant trees and shrubs when needed. Fall is actually one of our busiest seasons. During the autumn months, we plant all of our bulbs for the spring and do a lot of deadheading and pruning. Soon enough, the ski season is upon us. Holiday lighting is my major duty during winter, along with wrapping up the season.

PCMC: Where do you install the holiday lights?

MB: All over town—practically wherever there’s an electrical outlet! City buildings, parks, landscaped areas. No private

neighborhoods, but we really try to make all of our entry corridors, public plazas, and civic spaces look their best. It’s important for our town to be as festive as possible through the entire ski season; this is our bread and butter, after all.

PCMC: I bet spring is one of your favorite seasons.



MB: Yes, I love welcoming all of the color after a long winter. The bulbs bloom from March into June. We are especially lucky in the mountains because our bloom season lasts so much longer than in the valley—both because it’s colder and because of our altitude. I love designing with bulbs. After all signs of frost are gone, we hang about 200 baskets

around town. Back in the day, we grew them ourselves in our greenhouse, but we outgrew our capacity.

PCMC: Where do you place all of them?

MB: All over town: Main Street, Swede Alley, Prospector, Empire Avenue, The Transit Center, the MARC, and the Senior Center.

PCMC: How are you helping achieve the city’s goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2022?



see landscaped beds around the Huntsman sign and on the Thaynes buffer strip, not to mention areas around the McPolin Barn. In town, we have landscaped areas around the China Bridge parking lot, Sandridge lot, the Park Ave median strips, and—of course—City Park. We must be doing something right because we get a lot of compliments, especially from folks visiting from other cities.

PCMC: What would you consider your biggest challenge—aside from not having enough hours in the day?

MB: Probably managing invasive species (noxious weeds). We were able to eradicate dyer's woad from town, but now are battling garlic mustard, thistle, and white top. It's disheartening: whenever you think you have one problem under control, something else is added to the list.

PCMC: Do you have a favorite spot in town?

MB: The city just has so many hidden gems: it all depends on the season or even time of day. There are so many unique pocket parks, which are perfect for quiet reflection. Miner's Hospital has to be my all-time favorite, but I also love Main Street early in the morning; it has a completely different feel. I love coming out of my office early in the morning and watching the sun rise over the golf course pond. I also love watching a project that I had landscaped the year before come into bloom: those are my favorite spots for now.

Oh, and did I tell you? I love my job!

MB: We start by reducing our water footprint, which directly reduces our carbon one. We've always designed with drought-tolerant plants—going all the way back to the '80s. We started converting the beds to drip irrigation a few years ago. We water our beds every other day, every third day, or even once a week. We also have a green roof on the MARC, which reduces solar heat gain. And, of course, all of our holiday lights are LEDs—and have been for a very long time—which minimizes their environmental impact.

PCMC: What do you consider the most important part of your job?

MB: The look of the town: we want visitors to have a lasting first impression. We spend a lot of time beautifying our entryway corridors—from installing showy flower beds to simply picking up trash. If you drive down 224, you'll