



Rake and Hoe Garden Club Announces New Programs

WESTFIELD – The Rake and Hoe Garden Club of Westfield proudly begins its new season under the leadership of newly elected president Nina Sylvester.

A longtime resident of Mountainside and a dedicated member of the club for ten years, Sylvester brings a wealth of experience and passion to her new role. A certified flower show judge and Rutgers Master Gardener, she comes from a long line of avid gardeners – her mother and grandmothers all shared a deep love of horticulture. Her professional background includes a career in quality assurance at Merck, followed by the raising of three children.

Ms. Sylvester originally joined the club through her daughter Emma’s involvement in the Rake and Hoe Juniors program. Over the years, she has been recognized with multiple club awards, including the prestigious Barbara Mullin Award for Mentoring and Educating. Her dedication to nurturing the skills and creativity of fellow members in crafts and floral design has been deeply appreciated throughout the club. Her theme for the 2025–2026 club year is “Let’s Grow Together.”

“I’ve always loved the ‘Back to School’ season,” Ms. Sylvester shared. “It’s full of promise and potential— a fresh start. A new garden club year holds the same excitement. I’m honored to serve as president, and I look forward to all the ways we’ll grow together—through learning, gardening, and friendship.”

Nina will be supported by an Executive Board of Margot Partridge (Vice President), Betsey Chance (Treasurer), Joann Androconis (Recording Secretary), Jane Christiani (Corresponding Secretary) and Sharon Shiraga (Director). The Rake and Hoe Garden Club offers a wide range of educational programs, hands on workshops, and service opportunities. Membership is open to all levels of experience—no need to be a Master Gardener to join. The upcoming November 12 meeting will focus on “Sustainable Floral Design” with guest speaker Tania Gindil presenting techniques and materials focused on environmentally friendly floral arranging using locally sourced and native plant varieties.

Additional programs and workshops for the season include: Air-Dry Artistic Crafts creating trinket leaf dishes; Bird ID Apps learning how to use Merlin and other tools; Designing Without Oasis featuring sustainable floral arranging without floral foam; Still Life Photography Workshop and Thanksgiving Centerpiece Design Sessions. Members will also be active in community service, including maintaining local community gardens, creating floral arrangements for Mobile Meals, crafting ornaments and decorating holiday trees at Jardine Academy, managing plantings at the NJ Veterans Memorial Home and supporting the Rake and Hoe Juniors in youth-focused gardening activities. “ ‘Let’s Grow Together’ is about more than plants,” said Ms. Sylvester. “It’s about friendships, learning, and cultivating beauty in our gardens and our communities.”

Interested in joining? Guests are welcome to attend upcoming meetings in October and November to learn more. For more information, please contact Membership Chair Margot Partridge at margotpartridge816@gmail.com. The club is affiliated with the Garden Club of New Jersey, and the National Garden Clubs, Inc. Membership is open to residents of Westfield and surrounding towns.