

2016 Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture Awards

Award in Garden History

Toni Sylvester



Toni Sylvester and the late Ken Nobbs, founders of Heritage Roses NZ. Image courtesy HRNZ.

The RNZIH Garden History Award is granted to any nominated individual or organisation within New Zealand making distinguished contributions to horticultural history and conservation.

In April 2016, this award was conferred to Toni Sylvester of Kaiwaka, Northland, co-founder of Heritage Roses New Zealand (Inc.), for her work on the conservation and recording of heritage roses.

Heritage Roses NZ was formed in June 1980 by Mrs Toni Sylvester and the late Mr Ken Nobbs, who were both dedicated to growing and learning about old-fashioned roses. Toni and Ken first met in October 1979, when they sat next to each other in a bus as part of a garden

tour organised by the Auckland Horticultural club. They soon realised that they were kindred spirits, and both were members of heritage rose groups in Australia and the USA. A few days after their fortuitous first meeting, they set about establishing a group of gardeners in New Zealand with similar interests. Toni and Ken attracted an immediate and widespread response, thus launching Heritage Roses NZ.

Toni was the founding editor of a quarterly bulletin providing information about how to grow old roses, where to see them and where to buy them. Her husband Ron Sylvester was the first producer of this bulletin. Until they had sufficient members to establish a more structured executive and constitution, Ken Nobbs was the convenor of their newly formed group.

Thanks to the foundations laid by them, Heritage Roses NZ have grown to comprise 17 branches throughout New Zealand. Their *Heritage Roses New Zealand Journal* is now produced in full-colour and sent to all members.

The mission of Heritage Roses NZ is "to nurture interest in and love of the beautiful roses of the past, and to ensure the continued existence of these living antiques". Their stated objectives are to:

- Foster an appreciation of heritage roses
- Facilitate the conservation of heritage roses

- Encourage the growing of heritage roses in private and public gardens
- Provide opportunities for education and sharing of knowledge of heritage roses
- Recognise excellence and achievement by the presentation of national awards
- Function in harmony with other rose societies.

Along with other members of the Heritage Roses NZ group, Toni was also instrumental in locating a suitable site, and the planning and planting of the Nancy Steen Rose Garden in Parnell, Auckland, which opened in 1984.

The Heritage Roses NZ website is an important resource for those who are seeking information on heritage roses. Their NZ National Register of Heritage Roses (www.heritageroses.org.nz/rose-register) is an excellent initiative that began in 2011. This register aims to record all the old roses brought to New Zealand and to locate and propagate the lost and rare roses no longer commercially available in this country.

The successes of Heritage Roses NZ, and their important garden history and conservation work, can all be traced back to the pioneering initiatives of Toni Sylvester, her husband Ron, and Ken Nobbs some 36 years ago.

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