

Tape Log with Ben Stefanski, II

Didn't know a lot of history of Cultural Gardens.

1. Where did your parents settle in Cleveland? *Fleet Ave. by E 65th. Grandmother came to Cleveland around 1900.*
2. Earliest memory of the CCG? *Early 1960's, parents gave a bronze bust to the Polish Gardens of Koperinicus. Said the decision to use Koperinicus was his mothers. Mayor Celebreze was at the gardens. Says all the mayors have come to the gardens because the gardens portrays Cleveland in a positive way.*
3. Why do you feel that the CCG are important to you? *An external representation of what our nationality stands for. Is a platform from which we can present people who have contributed to the nationality.*
4. What are some examples that you have seen of Peace and Brotherhood over the years and also examples where you didn't see Peace and Brotherhood? *Vandalism in the early 1970's and the destruction of the busts were typical during that period because of the riots in the 1960's. Last June there was theft and vandalism and gave the gardens front page publicity for people to read about and alerted people to visit the gardens because people wanted to know what was being stolen because it might be special. The negative publicity has been a positive. People have volunteered to give money to damages now.*
5. Tell me about the bust of Scentkevich in 1996? *Family wanted to do something for bicentennial and they decided to reproduce Koperinicus in granite and put it back into the garden. They were no busts at the time just flowers. Found out there were busts stored in a storage area next to the greenhouse so they weren't stolen or vandalized. He heard that the Scentkavich had been taken off the pedestal because it wasn't stolen or vadalized in the 1970's. They had no permission to do this. Spent \$3,000 to restore this from the Cleveland Society of Poles. Also mentioned that people of African American decent have approached him about who to talk to to put in flowers. Stefanski's response no, Just Do It, You don't need anyone's permission to plant flowers.*
6. How did your family get into banking business? *Father was deslexic and waited for wife to graduate from college. Father only went thru 9th grade. Went to Washington to get a charter which he got turned down. Was discriminated against. Got to know Matt Simcheck who was a member of the Federal Reserve Bank. 1938 they got a loan and Started Federal Savings and Loan. Gave mortgages to people that nobody else gave mortgages to. He said that is the theme of Third Federal today, giving mortgages to others who can't get them. Father wasn't educated but he recruited the top 3 in each area high schools to work for him.*
7. Who made the busts? *Fisher Jeru made plaster busts that were 10 inches tall and from there they could do the oversize busts.*
8. The St. Kazmer's Fountain in the Polish garden had the biggest ceremony in the history of the gardens. Why was this? *Because of the proximity of the St. Kazmer being right across the street from the gardens. People came after church to take part in the celebration.*

9. If you can add a statue, who would it be of? *Chopin or Madam Curry, or the pope.*

10. How would you fund for these busts? *Ask around for money, this is difficult. There isn't a deep seeded interest in civic affairs. At one time, people were ashamed of being Polish. Says there's a chance someone might leave money in there will.*

11. Is there another city that has a Peace Gardens like Cleveland? *No, but we need to market the garden because it was tough to market the gardens because of the neighborhood. This has changed now with the bike paths and people taking jogs from Shaker Square.*

12. What kind of volunteer work did you do at the Polish Gardens? *Plants flowers because he lives in a condo and can't plant them there. Was a gardener and adopted the Polish Gardens and plants flowers every spring and watches them over the summer. Plant Impatia because of the shade and Salvia because there red and flaming. Has planted different flowers because the shading has changed because the trees have grown Saying you can't use petunias because they need sunlight.*

13. What is the importance of bringing back the name Liberty Row where MKL is? *Ben puts flags on the pedestals of MLK. He visited his grandmother who lived at a house that overlooked the park. He is very patriotic and renaming Liberty Row would be a remembrance of being a free society to the people who have died. Says they should have changed East Blvd to MLK. It is a memorial to soldiers and members of Cuyahoga County who were killed in WWI in 1917 and 1918. Each soldier was given a 6 inch bronze medallion with their names on it on a one foot pedestal. There used to be medallions of these soldiers lined next to Liberty Row. Is still trying to dig for medallions because he believes they have been covered with dirt over the years. 1985 the changed the name to MLK and there wasn't a controversy. George Forbes wanted a remembrance of Dr. Martin Luther King.*