



He dreams of roses

World-famous expert returns to Sacramento

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON



Rose expert Stephen Scanniello prunes roses in Sacramento's Historic City Cemetery during a 2019 workshop. He's back again this week.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SACRAMENTO DIGGS GARDENING

In the rose world, Stephen Scanniello is a rock star.

Curator of the New York Botanical Garden's Peggy Rockefeller Rose Garden, Scanniello is a world-renowned rose expert. Author of several books and a sought-after private consultant, he also is in charge of the revival of Connecticut's Elizabeth Park, the nation's oldest public rose garden. And as president of the Heritage Rose Foundation, he is a leader in preservation efforts around the globe.

But every January, he makes a beeline for Sacramento. The climbers at the Historic City Cemetery need him.

"This is my fifth trip to prune at the cemetery," he said by phone from his New Jersey home. "It's a working weekend. I'm looking forward to it."

For Sacramento rose lovers, it's an amazing treat, like Bobby Flay dropping into your favorite neighborhood restaurant and volunteering to chop veggies while you watch.

With shears in hand, Scanniello will lead two pruning workshops at the cemetery Saturday, Jan. 11—one devoted to climbers, the other to shrub roses. He'll also make a free presentation about his preservation work at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 9 to the Sacramento Rose Society at the Shepard Garden and Arts Center in McKinley Park. On Friday, he plans to visit the Woodland Public Library's rose garden.

On a personal pilgrimage, Scanniello comes to Sacramento in part to make sure the cemetery's famous roses are still there.

"I think it's one of the most interesting rose gardens and collections of roses in the world," he said. "There's not anything like it on the East Coast.

To me, it's incredibly refreshing to see these roses growing in what appears to be a safe place."

Scanniello said that any garden is at risk, and that the cemetery's roses are no exception. With its distinctive arches and arbors, the garden has survived threats before and may face them again.

Considered a "living library of roses," the cemetery's Heritage Rose Garden is home to about 500 antique and old garden roses, many of them found nowhere else. Harking back to its Victorian roots, the two-acre garden strives to preserve these rose rarities.

"It's an amazing collection, a real treasure," Scanniello said. "Roses grow so perfectly in Sacramento. They don't have the disease issues we have [on the East Coast]. They don't have to contend with winter weather like we do."

Because of our climate and growing conditions, roses naturally thrive in Sacramento. The cemetery garden is proof.

Added Scanniello: "Letting roses grow to their full capacity is wonderful to see."

That's one of the aspects that makes the cemetery collection unique; the bushes are allowed room to stretch out instead of packed tightly together. That also makes them more difficult to prune.

Scanniello enjoys the challenge as well as teaching others how to care for these roses.

"I just love to be around people who love this garden," he said. "They're inspirational to me." □



EVENT DETAILS

Stephen Scanniello leads pruning workshops

Historic City Cemetery's Heritage Rose Garden (1000 Broadway) at 9 a.m. (climbers) and 1 p.m. (shrubs) Saturday, Jan. 11; \$10 donation. Tickets and details: cemeteryrose.org.

Debbie Arrington, an award-winning garden writer and lifelong gardener, is co-creator of the Sacramento Digs Gardening blog and website.

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