

## *Christine & Jeff Diskin ~ Garden #6*

The meticulously landscaped 4.5 acres of Jeff and Christine Diskin's Nevada City property has been both a labor of love for creating their "Banner Forest Retreat" for the extended family of 55, as well as an homage to the family's recently departed patriarch, Nevada County native, Ernie McQueen.

"There was no landscaping, just lots of asphalt with the original house and barn," says Jeff. "Our daughter's upcoming wedding was the impetus to get it all going." With his mom Linda's "super green thumb" and both Linda and Christine's ideas, the project got underway in 2018. It was Ernie's vision, though, to create a "working mine" throughout the garden, "with every piece telling a story," says Jeff.

Scattered among Ernie's favorite collection of quartz, limestone, agate, obsidian and basalt pathways are old oar carts, monitors, sluice boxes, Pelton wheels and an array of outdoor art sculptures: full size horses and deer, hollowed-out logs with peeking gnomes and woodland creatures - as well as a life-size wood carving of Ernie McQueen himself.

There's a cut-flower garden, blooming with hyacinth, daisies, daffodils, crocuses, roses, wildflowers and tulips - a total of over 9,000 tulips are planted throughout the entire property. When blooming, neighbors and family members are encouraged to bring a vase over for an arrangement of flowers to take home. So plentiful that bouquets of fresh flowers are taken over to the Bret Harte residence in Grass Valley every couple of weeks. Kendra McLaughlin, a Maine transplant and friend of the family, manages the cut flower garden.

A "western town" has been replicated with old cabins from Ernie and Linda's previous property, Foggy Meadow Farms on East Bennett in Grass Valley. There's a Post Office & Pony Express, Ernie's Ice Cream Parlor, and Linda's Emporium, that all house equipment needed for maintaining the property. The 3,000 square ft "barn," which Jeff and family call the "Shop and Multi-purpose Room," has a loft and granny unit as well as a separate game room area for the extended family of 50 who come each weekend for a Saturday or Sunday brunch. Irrigation is local NID water, mostly a drip system, says Jeff. Although many trees have been taken down there are still beautiful trees and flowering brush throughout the property: 3 Fuji apple trees; eastern redbud, Douglas fir, cedar, redwoods, English laurel, dogwood, maple, smoke trees, rhododendrons and hibiscus. Organic plantings to keep pests at bay: mint, citrus, traps for flies and mosquitos. As they've progressed in gardening, Jeff says that he's really enjoyed the pollinators: bees and various birds, with 20 to 30 hummingbirds alone.

As for what he enjoys most, Jeff stops and smiles;

"I really wasn't a big gardener - I took it for granted - mostly because my mom and wife did it, he says. "Now, I enjoy living among all of the beauty . . . and I'm grateful to be able to share it with others."