

Warren's Garden Kethley House Benjamin Rose Place

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Building a home for 184 people that has the same atmosphere and intimacy to which they are accustomed is virtually impossible. But that was the challenge of the Benjamin Rose Institute as it set out to build a new skilled nursing facility. The board, staff, volunteers and donors spent many hours debating and providing information that would create a semi-medical facility that would over the years meet both the physical and psychological needs of the residents as well as their families who come to visit. The gardens are a vital part of that planning.

Various scents of perennials and shrubs waft through the air. Bees and butterflies flit nearby. You find a small patio and a sculpture of a house welcomes you. Even though you are in a wheelchair, you can see the details of everything you encounter.

You are in “Warren’s Garden,” the first phase of an extensive landscaping project at Kethley House at Benjamin Rose Place. The garden conveys the personal and professional touch of peoples’ contribution. Mrs. Dusenbury envisioned a lovely garden at Kethley House which was named in honor of her husband, who died from Alzheimer’s disease.

Inspired by the work of sculptor Charlotte Lees, Mrs. Dusenbury commissioned Ms. Lees, who created four sculptures for the garden—a deer in a wooded landscape, butterflies in a fern, and a house featuring decorative buttons from the button box of Mrs. Dusenbury’s mother, Zola Little, who also had Alzheimer’s disease. The most stunning sculpture is “The Quilt of Life,” which depicts childhood, parenthood, and old age, among other stages of life, as quilt blocks.

Mary Jane Lovering, a principal at Vertech’s Design, Inc., designed the gardens using her combined background in physical therapy, gerontology, and landscape architecture to put in place sensory stimulation elements to create a homelike setting. The Toronto-based firm specializes in creating outdoor spaces for health care facilities for people with Alzheimer’s disease and other cognitive impairments as well as other needs associated with the aging process.