

# Beauty in our backyard

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The Fresno City College campus is covered with gorgeous man-made and natural

scenery everywhere you look, but the Gladys Brown Botanical Garden, founded in the mid-70s, is a true testament to Mother Nature's magic.

Every day, students visit the garden to get away from the commotion on campus and enjoy a moment of serenity. Even though the attraction is open to all, most people aren't aware of the garden's history and require efforts to keep the greenery green.

Steve DaSilva, the horticulture program specialist, has been tending to the garden for close to 32 years, starting in 1992 as a groundskeeper.



This will be DaSilva's final semester at Fresno City, so I sat down with him to reflect on the garden's legacy and discuss what the position has meant to him.

During those first ten years, DaSilva worked with volunteer Gladys Brown before he took over as the area's manager.

Steve DaSilva poses for a picture in the southeast corner of the lush green greenhouse on Feb. 2. Photo/ Logan Payne

"I recognized that this lady wasn't going to be here forever, and the school needed a permanent person to maintain this area. I knew



Students sit and socialize on the path that surrounds the Koi fish pond on the bright morning of Jan. 11. Photo/ Logan Payne

DaSilva's contributions to the space have gone far beyond what you might expect. Planted throughout the moss patches and pebble farms are clay masks decorated with unique artistic vision. These faces are made in collaboration with the Ceramics department. This biology-art project wouldn't exist without DaSilva and his desire to "incorporate some art into the grounds."

As we talked about the ceramics around the garden, my eyes couldn't help but drift to my left, out the office door and towards the custom-made Batman mask which peered over a pot made of cement and filled with pine from the tree that shaded The Knight.

Some of the beloved Koi fish have been in the garden pond since DaSilva joined the school, but he's also established a partnership with The Central California Koi Society to ensure there are always plenty of fish in the pond for students to appreciate and photograph.

"I've enjoyed working here over the years, and true interaction with students is just the most rewarding part," DaSilva said as he folded his arms and glanced at the greenhouse he'd spent years tailoring to.

The greenhouse is usually locked during the day, but DaSilva assured me that the plants inside provide students with a "great deal of great education." When I asked for more specifics, he quickly pulled out a pamphlet from the drawer underneath.

The header on the pamphlet read "The Trees of FCC." With over 60 unique species of trees listed within the pages, and some over 100 years of age, this tour of the campus offers some of the best sights around. If you'd like to pick up a pamphlet for the tree walk, head over to DaSilva's office in the garden for more information.

The garden is fenced and tucked next to the math/science building on the east side of campus, where the doors are (usually) open every Monday through Friday from 8 to 5 p.m. There has been ongoing construction near the garden's entrance for weeks now, so students will have to walk around to the south entrance right across from the Parking Lot D to access the natural beauty.

The annual Valentine's Day plant sale will be returning this year in the garden and is open to all students and staff. There are a handful of the soon-to-be-available plants, and they will be available to purchase at 9 a.m. on Feb. 14.

"It's been a gift, but at the end of this semester in May, I will be retiring after 32 years here," DaSilva concluded.



Batman's ceramic mask peers out from a cement pot, sitting comfortably under a pine tree and across from the Koi pond where the sun shines bright upon a sitting student on Jan. 11. Photo by/ Logan Payne

it was something I wanted to do for my career," DaSilva said as we glanced around his office.

He sat below a long and narrow window that pointed to the fence of the math science building. During the early morning fog, the window illuminated and colorized the quilt of seed packets that enveloped the table we spoke over.