

Leaving a lasting legacy

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Kota Kinabalu: History was re-written with the unveiling of the Inner Wheel Garden Plaque at the historic Atkinson Clock Tower, Wednesday, a sequel to the 2015 revival of the Garden spearheaded by the Inner Wheel Club of Kota Kinabalu (IWCKK), in collaboration with City Hall (DBKK) and the Sabah State Museum. What made the occasion even more significant was that it coincided with International Inner Wheel (IIW) Day, celebrated all over the world. IWCKK walked the talk in translating the IIW Theme (2017-2018), "Leave a Lasting Legacy", into reality.

The history of the Inner Wheel Garden, created by the Inner Wheel Club of Jesselton (the forerunner of IWCKK) at a cost of \$1,400, dates back to 1961. The original plaque had gone missing for many years, apparently the work of vandals.

The plaque tells it all – Inner Wheel Garden Est. 3rd July 1961. The Inner Wheel Garden (formerly known as The Anns' Garden) at the Atkinson Clock Tower was declared open by E.J.H. Berwick, President of the Jesselton Gardening Society and Director of Agriculture on July 3, 1961. The Garden is now maintained by City Hall.

Lady Goode, wife of the then Governor of British North Borneo (now Sabah), was present at the opening ceremony. She was an Honorary Member of the Inner Wheel Club of Jesselton.

The joint unveiling ceremony was conducted by DBKK Director-General Joannes Solidau who represented Mayor Datuk Yeo Boon Hai, Sabah Museum Director Mansur Assun, Sabah Archives Director Mohd Said Hinayat, Sabah Tourism Board (STB) General Manager Suzaini Ghani and IWCKK President Cecilia Amid.

Among those who witnessed the ceremony were the wife of Mayor and Chairperson of Puspanita Kota Kinabalu City Branch, Datin Rohayah Pawzy, DBKK Director of Bureau of Economic, Tourism and International Relations, Fauziahton Ag Samad, DBKK Director of Landscape Department, Walter Kenson, Sabah Museum Senior Curator (Corporate Communications), Stella Moo, Member of DBKK Board of Advisers cum Chairperson of Tourism Development Committee, Datuk Nancy Ho, and President of the Inner Wheel Club of Kota Kinabalu Rafflesia, Helen Morgan.

Interestingly, Joannes was a signatory of the tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2015 by three parties – DBKK, Sabah State Museum and IWCKK – in an effort to revive the Inner Wheel Garden.

In his speech read out by Joannes, Yeo said the Atkinson Clock Tower (previously known as Jesselton Clock Tower) stands proud as a Heritage Building much to the admiration of our local community and visitors alike.

"City Hall is happy to render its assistance as part of our service to the city. We hope that the Garden could be maintained and cherished by all our visitors. We advocate 'zero garbage' around the city because we want our city to be 'Clean, Green and Safe'. City Hall will continue to spare no efforts to ensure that Kota Kinabalu remains as a beautiful and liveable City," he said.

Yeo's aspiration is that the revived Inner Wheel Garden would be another signature site of the city "as we promote our City for the world to see."

Meanwhile, Joannes noted that the Atkinson Clock Tower is becoming increasingly popular with tourists, saying he has often seen them taking snapshots of the landmark.

It is reportedly the only oldest standing structure in Kota Kinabalu that has survived to this day.

Completed in 1905 after two years of construction work, the clock tower was built to commemorate Jesselton's first District Officer, Francis Gorge Atkinson, who died of malaria at the age of 28 on December 6, 1902.

The second son of Rev F.H. Atkinson of Jersey and Mary Edith Atkinson was reportedly a popular District Officer and adored by many. Mary loved her son so much that she built the all-wood, no nails structure in memory of him. That was during the British North Borneo Chartered Company administration.

Earlier, in his address, Mansur said IWCKK's endeavour was very timely, given the passing of the new State Heritage Enactment 2017 and its enforcement on January 1 this year.

"Today is a historical day as we witness the unveiling of the Inner Wheel Garden Plaque at this historical site below the iconic Atkinson Clock Tower. I commend the President and her team for the initiative to reactivate a Garden planted 57 years ago in Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu) and to beautify the capital city," he said.

Noting that the site is in close proximity to Padang Merdeka (yet another heritage site of Kota Kinabalu), Mansur said KK is alive with a very rich cultural heritage. "Heritage sites will further enhance the State's wealth in culture and heritage. The Inner Wheel Club of Kota Kinabalu is in essence contributing to the legacy of our State."

Both Joannes and Mansur acknowledged the constructive role of Ho who was instrumental in the revival of the Inner Wheel Garden and installation of a new plaque by forming the Inner Wheel Garden Committee. Members comprised past Presidents Datin Carlota Lo, Daisy Chong, Margaret Chin, Emmeline Tan, Gillian Lee and Tengku Marilyn Tengku Adlin.

The starting-point began in December 2013 when Lee (then IWCKK President), Chin and Tan explored the grounds of the Atkinson Clock Tower in an attempt to identify the location of the Inner Wheel Garden and the exact spot where a plaque was apparently once installed. Ho, then past IIW Board Director, volunteered to study the report on the ladies' findings. Subsequently, she approached the various authorities in Kota Kinabalu to present the Club's case to them, and discussed the possibility of reviving the Garden.

Confirming this, President Amid said Ho also mooted the idea of installing a new plaque, and a joint committee involving the three parties (IWCKK, DBKK and Sabah State Museum) was set up in December last year with past President Datin Tengku Adlina Tengku Adlin as Chairperson of the Inner Wheel Garden Committee.

DBKK and the Museum were represented by Fauziathon and Moo respectively.

"In less than a month, we witness a huge transformation of this place. This is attributed to the close collaboration among the three parties with energetic (Datuk) Nancy as the main pillar and key strategist, knitting these three parties to work together as an effective team," she added, while thanking the Museum for allowing the Inner Wheel Garden to continue as an important feature of the Atkinson Clock Tower and the State Archives for enabling the Committee to relive the history.

Amid said the unveiling of the Inner Wheel Garden Plaque marked a realisation of the theme "Leave a Lasting Legacy", where the plaque serves as a permanent record of Inner Wheel's legacy since 1961 at this historical site.

According to her, DBKK has done an excellent job in maintaining the garden with a lot of creativity.

"We understand that they have planted Bauhinia Kockiana that will soon transform the outlook of this garden."

After the formalities were over, Joannes, accompanied by Ho, who is also a past International Inner Wheel Board Director, led the Heritage Walk along Australia Place to the Jesselton Hotel, one of the oldest hotels in the State Capital. Preceding them was the Sabah Museum's tagunggak group comprising gong and drum beaters.

The entourage adjourned to the hotel's Bayu Restaurant for the IIW Day celebration where Ho recited the Candle of Friendship Poem, followed by the traditional lighting of the Candle by Rokiah Staun, who is the National Representative (2017-2018) of Inner Wheel Districts 330 & 331.

Fellowship prevailed after the cake-cutting ceremony to mark the auspicious occasion.

In her vote of thanks, Organising Chairperson Datin Tengku Adlina Tengku Adlin described the day as the biggest in the history of IWCKK. "An event like this cannot happen overnight. It requires planning and a bird's eye for details, and we have been fortunate enough to be backed by the involvement of DBKK and Sabah State Museum," she said. Rokiah then extinguished the Candle of Friendship. - Mary Chin