



Darren Heimbecker
Owner, Botanical Garden Founder/Designer
Whistling Gardens

After receiving a degree in Outdoor Education, Darren left his 18 year nursery career to purchase a 56 acre farm in Wilsonville, Ontario with his wife Wanda to fulfill his lifelong botanical vision. In 2006, Whistling Gardens Nursery and Garden Centre were established, attracting plant collectors from across Canada and the United States. May 26th 2012 marked the official grand opening of "Canada's Newest Horticultural Playground" as the multi-award winning privately owned botanical gardens features 22 acres of lush landscaped manicured gardens home to North America's Largest Public Peony and Conifer Collections.

Their fountain Amphitheatre display has become a popular day and nighttime attraction which has approximately 110 jets choreographed to new world music, composed by Darren. Three years in the making, in 2022, the Festival of Fountains – The Night Garden introduced guests to a highly visual immersive experience of music, water, and lighting. *"By working with engineers and technology experts around the world, we believe we have created a theatrical fountain experience unlike anything ever seen before in Canada."* This is currently the only show of its kind in Canada which introduces custom made international technology, receiving a Best New Event Nomination at FEO. In 2024, the Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation, recognized the Festival of Fountains as a 2023 Innovator of the Year Award Regional Finalist! The gardens also host several diverse special events annually.

Since its inception peer groups have recognized Whistling Gardens and owners, for their best business practices, horticultural excellence and garden design as a recipient of numerous municipal, provincial, national, and International awards. Garden Awards and recognition include: Canada's Best New Garden Experience Award, Sustainable Tourism Ambassador of the Year Award, Millstream Award, and Federal Medal Recipient of the Canada 150 Award. Notable accolades include Best Local Attraction and Wedding Facility, Top 10 Botanical Garden in Canada, Top 10 Conifer Gardens of the World, Best Gardening Event of the Year "Peony Festival", Best Botanical Gardens of The Year, Top 10 Amazing Places of Norfolk County and recognized with a Canada 150 Garden Experience Designation.

In 2023 Darren and his wife Wanda received the prestigious Garden Tourism Person(s) of the Year Leadership Award at the International Garden Tourism Conference held in Victoria, British Columbia recognizing their efforts in establishing garden diversity and innovation. He has also been recognized as 1 of 20 Canadians Shaping Our Future Gardens by Garden Making Magazine and remains a regular guest contributor to Fine Gardening Magazine. Currently the Heimbeckers' have been nominated for an Innovator of the Year Award to be presented by the Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation in 2024. When he's not in the gardens, you can find Darren in the studio composing music and choreographing for the upcoming theatrical fountain performances.



Wanda Heimbecker
Communications and Business Development Manager
Whistling Gardens

Wanda Heimbecker is recognized as a highly motivated, reputable, business professional with over twenty years of award winning success in the areas of; communications, public and media relations, program/special event facilitation, and financial management within the government, philanthropic, labour relations and corporate sectors.

As a self employed entrepreneur, owner of her award-winning consulting firm for over 30 years, she has represented over 100 clients, generating millions of dollars for numerous philanthropic endeavors. Wanda has co-authored a sales/mentoring education book "Sales Guru's Speakout" reaching international distribution which is now translated into several languages. Inspired by creativity, integrity and determination, she shares her husband's authentic passion in transforming their century farmland, from a cornfield into a botanical garden. The vision for their "*labour of love*" was first introduced while they were dating. Building Whistling Gardens continues to reveal opportunities for discovery through botanical preservation, education while providing a venue for respite and celebration. *"The gardens are our legacy. It's a privilege to be on this remarkable journey requiring many sacrifices. The rewards can't be measured when you are attracting like minded fellow nature enthusiasts who see the value of your work or offer you their trust as we host their most intimate sacred life moments."*

Tremendous industry support offers her encouragement as memorable moments welcomed prestigious guests as His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor who graced their gardens for their Peony Collection unveiling. Working in collaboration, or in a leadership capacity, her achievements have been recognized by industry peers, as a recipient of numerous national, federal, provincial and municipal awards in the areas of: Garden Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, New Tourism Idea, Youth Television Programming, Youth Mentorship and a Federal Medal Recipient of the Canada 150 Award. In 2023, Wanda and her husband Darren were recognized as the recipients of the prestigious, Garden Tourism Person(s) of the Year Leadership Award at the International Garden Tourism Conference held in Victoria, British Columbia their efforts in establishing garden diversity and innovation. In 2024, the Heimbeckers' we honoured by the Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation as a 2023 Innovator of the Year Award Regional Finalist!

As a humanitarian, her core beliefs reinforce authentic positive relationships, eternal growth and volunteerism, noting well over 70 community/leadership volunteer appointments contributing to provincial and municipal government boards, local business associations, economic initiatives and philanthropic sectors.