

Homed



A contented head at Hollard

Bernie Hollard would be happy to know his garden legacy lives on, strong and flourishing under the watchful eye of a new gardener - and an Aussie at that. Sonja Slinger talks to the new head gardener at Hollard Gardens.

After coming to Taranaki on a whim 14 years ago, Shannon Boden is very content here. She has a new life, new home and now new job.

She has no desire to return to the heat and crawlies of Australia's gardens and loves nothing more than pulling weeds in the shade and shaping the life of Hollard's legacy.

"I didn't like gardening as a kid, heck no. My dad used to make us do the weeding and the soil was so hard and dry, just pulling the weeds was a major effort. Here it's a pleasure to pull weeds, the soil is beautiful and it's cool."

And - nothing crawling in the undergrowth," says Boden with just a hint of an Australian accent.

The 41-year-old is thrilled to have landed the top job at Hollard, one of three public gardens run by Taranaki Regional Council. Just listening to her, it's easy to detect her passion for the place, her love for the small team she works with and her enthusiasm about the future there.

"It's just a fantastic place to be, so much diversity among plants here, there's a lot for me to do and learn. It's such a pleasure to be here."

Boden was born in Queensland to an Australian father but Kiwi mother from Mangakino.

She grew as a teenager that she wanted to work outdoors but ended up working inside studying plant tissue and after a while, packed that in to go waitressing for a bit and consider her options.

As a single mum with a 2-year-old son, she decided the Gold Coast was not the place to raise him and with her quest to work in horticulture she started looking at better life places.

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She knew that to flourish in gardening, she would have to gain proper qualifications so she enrolled at Massey University and studied towards a horticulture diploma by distance learning.

Then a job was advertised for Tupare (another of TRC's public gardens) as an apprentice in amenity horticulture so she applied and the rest, as they say, is history. She worked for three years at Tupare then went on to Hollard where she has worked since.

Last month she was super excited to be appointed head gardener there.

Boden has an easy manner and warm face. She enjoys the contact with visitors as well as the day to day head down work in the soil. She is not shy of a chainsaw or getting out the big tools to tackle a job but is also thankful for the team who all work with her on the

garden including a small core of volunteers who regularly pop in.

They've recently completed a major redevelopment at the main entrance, replacing the old drive with a meandering pathway through dappled trees and flowering borders taking visitors to the heart of the garden, a modern visitor centre, much of it incorporating recycled flooring and features from the Hollard homestead, which had to be demolished some years ago.

Boden is inspired by the years of work and sheer dedication from Bernie Hollard and his wife Rose, who gifted their 12.5 acres of land near Kaponga in South Taranaki to the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust. In 2002, ownership was transferred to the Taranaki Regional Council.

Bernie Hollard grew up on the family dairy farm and in 1928, bought the Upper Manaia Rd property, but quickly brought in sharemilkers so that he could focus on his gardening, which he'd loved since a young child watching his grandparents in their garden.

He developed the garden around the farm house and it reflects almost a lifetime of work by a private individual and is a Garden of National Significance.

From the early 1970s, the private garden was open to the public initially as a fundraiser for the Kaponga Lions Club. Bernie Hollard died in 1996, aged 92, and Rose in 2004 (age unsure).

The couple had two sons Thoron and Milton which they named two specially bred rhododendrons after.

Today there are four main areas, the old and new gardens, Bernie's home garden, the family corner (which includes play area and free barbecues) and a visitor's Hollard centre which depicts life of the Hollard family, complete with old 1970s armchairs and a Philips K9 television which runs slides of the original garden and Hollard family.

Boden is excited about new plans for the place, including revamping the old garden to showcase rare and endangered native plants there.

Other collections to look after include a variety of old fashioned and hard to source plants such as *Enkianthus campanulatus*, the old fashioned and delicate Lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*), beautiful scented *Rugosa* Roses, Solomon's Seal - *Polygonatum spp.* and *Maianthemum bifolium* or false lily of the valley.

Her favourite spot though is working beneath a massive golden pine, which was planted in 1853 and only takes from cuttings. It's a special place, huge and protective - perhaps as Bernie Hollard planned his garden to be.



Shannon Boden, new head gardener at Hollard.

PHOTOS: NIUTEA TITCHNER



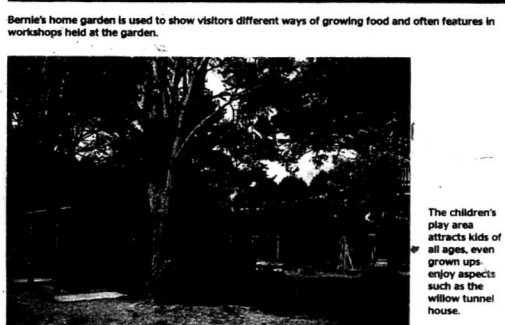
Bernie's home garden is primarily a food producing patch where an array of produce is grown.



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The children's play area attracts kids of all ages, even grown-ups enjoy aspects such as the willow tunnel house.