



CRAPE MYRTLE TRAILS GRANT REQUEST

The Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney (CMT) respectfully asks the McKinney Community Development Corporation for a 2012 Cycle II Promotional/Community Event Grant in the amount of \$8,000 in support of the 2012 Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney *Fun Run and More!* MCDC's support will enable CMT to widen the appeal of this seven-year-old event and broaden the geographic reach of our promotional efforts to draw runners and families from outside the McKinney area. Plans are under way to expand this before-Thanksgiving family 5K and 1-mile run/walk to include activities in a "Myrtle Village," where local businesses will host fun events such as bounce houses, carnival games, face painting and a food court. Our 2012 event will include a significant outreach to our neighboring cities, as well as the entire DFW Metroplex. This will allow us to attract new visitors to our family-oriented celebration based in McKinney, which has been named one of the best places to live in the U.S.

I. MISSION, GOALS AND SCOPE OF CRAPE MYRTLE TRAILS OF MCKINNEY

The Crape Myrtle Trails is a unique non-profit organization in McKinney's rapidly growing part of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. CMT's mission is the environmental, educational and economic enrichment of the community through unique public-private collaborations. Since 1998 the organization's efforts have focused on extensive plantings ("Trails") of crape myrtles throughout McKinney, and in spring 2011, CMT board members and city dignitaries officially opened McKinney's newest public park — the \$1.3 million World Collection Park of The Crape Myrtle Trails. This 7-acre park, located near Hwy 121 and Stacy Road in southwest McKinney, is planted with all known species and varieties of crape myrtles. The park was made possible, in large part, through project grant funds from MCDC.

CMT began 13 years ago with the efforts of a group of civic-minded residents led by noted Texas horticulturist Neil Sperry. The group wanted to promote community beautification projects in and around the City of McKinney. The projects, they believed, should make the most of one of the South's most beautiful flowering shrubs and trees, the crape myrtle. Knowing that crape myrtles can brighten landscapes from May through September, and that this colorful plant is highly tolerant of the extremes of North Texas weather and growing conditions, the group discussed the feasibility of planting miles of crape myrtles in city medians and along newly developing highways. In time, they focused on three key goals:

- Promoting civic pride in beautification through the collaborative planting of thousands of crape myrtles within the dozens of miles of medians in our city, also in public school, industrial/ commercial properties, and residential landscapes throughout our city.

- Encouraging travel and tourism to McKinney by hosting special events specifically around crape myrtles, also by collaborating with other McKinney organizations to provide richer rewards for visiting our city.
- Developing The World Collection Park, in which all known varieties and species of *Lagerstroemia* could be showcased side-by-side. This now-complete collection will prove important to horticultural and botanical people from all over the world and will become a destination for travel, tourism and public events.

Today, with the support of city and county agencies, and with the sponsorships of many individuals and area businesses, CMT is well on its way to realizing its long-term goals. The World Collection Park, still young, encompasses a unique and important plant collection, and CMT has reached the halfway point in fulfillment of its pledge to oversee the planting of 50,000 new crape myrtles in publicly visible spaces of McKinney within a 10-year period. These Trails bloom through the warm-weather months and are usually at their peak of beauty from mid-June into early July. In early summer of 2012, McKinney's Trails have been the most beautiful they have ever been, and members of the CMT Board believe McKinney is well on its way to becoming "America's Crape Myrtle City."

CMT Operations and Community Support

Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney relies heavily on its 15-member volunteer board, which includes area professional people, educators, horticulturists, several former McKinney Citizens of the Year, and a former McKinney mayor. Respected McKinney businessman John Rattan serves as the board president, former Mayor Bill Whitfield is a dedicated board member, and noted Texas horticulturist Neil Sperry is the immediate past president and continues to serve as a member of the board. Former executive director Susan Owens is still an active member of the board, and scores of able volunteers assist CMT with its varied projects like those described below.

Over the years, CMT personnel have developed several ongoing community events. One of the most important has been the Crape Myrtle Trails Fun Run, for which we seek MCDC funding in 2012 Cycle II. (Please see details about this year's event in Section II of this proposal.) Another annual community event is CMT's Mother's Day Project, an education and planting project that provides hundreds of McKinney fifth-grade "graduates" with crape myrtle plants to take home to their mothers on the Friday before Mother's Day. This year a T-shirt design contest for elementary art students drew much interest. Other CMT community projects have included the planting of crape myrtles (nearly 200 of them) on eight McKinney Independent School District campuses.

Throughout the year, CMT staff and volunteers work to assist area businesses, agencies, schools and churches in the beautification of McKinney through the planting of crape myrtles. In one recent example of CMT's truly synergistic activities, board volunteers partnered with students and parents from Boyd High School to plant more than 100 crape myrtles and fall annuals in an area of homes operated by the McKinney Housing Authority. In another, CMT donated crape myrtles to the renovation of the home and landscape of a McKinney resident in dire need of assistance.

Much of Crape Myrtle Trails' community support has come from "Super Sponsors," area businesses that have planted crape myrtles on their property and that have contributed to

Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney. One of the newer Super Sponsors is the McKinney SPCA, where the increasingly beautiful grounds feature many new crape myrtles.

II. PROMOTIONAL/COMMUNITY EFFORT FOR WHICH FUNDING IS REQUESTED

CMT seeks funding in this MCDC cycle for its 2012 *Fun Run and More!* – a 5K and 1-mile fun run and walk, scheduled along with a post-run family festival, on Saturday, Nov. 17, 2012, from 7 to 11:30 a.m. We have retained RunOn as our race coordinator. RunOn (with a store located in McKinney at Lake Forest Drive and Eldorado Parkway) is a major player in the running scene in North Texas, as well as Oklahoma. The company's mailing list is made up of more than 64,000 runners who have participated locally. Our race will be featured soon on the RunOn website run-calendar and then in their early-November e-mail blast. Responders will be driven to our race site, which will prominently display the MCDC logo. (Find more information about RunOn at runontexas.com.)

Outreach for the 2012 *Fun Run and More!* will include promotions to the school systems of Frisco and Allen, as well as those of McKinney, our school "base." To the extent that it is practical to do so, we will include smaller districts like Prosper, Celina, Melissa, and Fairview. Our 2011 event drew 435 participants from McKinney schools (including parents and siblings of MISD students who designated themselves as such). Popular features of the event were the School Spirit Awards for schools with high participation, and the "Coaches Kiss a Pig" activity after the run. Plans are to continue these motivational activities. CMT Board members will again personally present cash awards to the physical education departments of participating schools — \$5 per running participant. (The 2011 awards were presented at Friday assemblies of schools that invited us. The enthusiasm at these events was electric as well as heart-warming.)

The Myrtle Village part of the 2012 *Fun Run and More!* is planned as a family-oriented celebration that is a post-run party featuring a disk jockey and music, food and drinks, activities like last year's popular Kathy's Critters petting zoo, and other family-fun happenings. The site of Myrtle Village will be the area surrounding the Craig Ranch Cooper Fitness Center, where the starting gate and finish line will be located.

The route for the 2012 *Fun Run and More!* will take walkers and runners along many of the beautifully planted roads of Craig Ranch. The City of McKinney Police Department has approved the route.

As they did last year, high schools, middle schools and elementary schools will compete for "school-level championships," and local companies will be invited to put together employee teams to compete for our version of "business championships." Our aim is to develop an expanded fun run that will boost civic pride and lead to the establishment of the annual *Fun Run and More!* as a premier event for Collin County and the DFW Metroplex, thus leading the way for an increase in tourism and expansion of the city's economic base.

As in the past, a key aim is to increase participation with awards at many levels, encouraging both dedicated runners and school children to participate in the run in order to exercise for fitness and fun and, in the case of school children, to earn money for their

schools' physical education programs. (Once again, \$5 of every school student's entry fee will go back to the student's school).

We will use our MDCD grant money exclusively to assist with the critical "seed" and promotional items, without which we are unlikely to have a successful event. These include: sponsor solicitation printed pieces; T-shirts; business window display promotional posters; school promotional posters; business sign-up forms; school sign-up forms; and radio advertising. All promotional materials will mention MCDC as a co-sponsor along with the title sponsors. (See details in the attached events budget.)

Run the Trail Sponsorships and Publicity

The *2012 Fun Run and More!* Committee, headed by McKinney businessman Phil Wheat, has developed a new plan for obtaining support from community businesses and individuals. We will continue our effort from last year to build a large base of local business sponsors. Last year's total was 22 sponsors, which more than doubled our best prior year. One contributing factor to this success was our providing a substantial number of ways to promote each business's "brand" for the total sponsorship cost of \$500. These brand-promoting opportunities included multiple one-business signs ("yard sign" type) at the start-finish area, the stage area and along the race course; business names on event tee-shirts; business names on event posters and other promotional printed material; and sponsor appreciation plaques.

In 2012 we anticipate having 20 of these grassroots sponsors, who will either contribute the \$500 in cash or directly offset budgeted expenses, for a total of \$10,000 in revenue coming from our core (Premier) sponsors. We will also offer an Ongoing Premier sponsorship level, which includes all the benefits of our Premier sponsorship, but with ongoing advertising on our web-site. This level of sponsorship will have a cost of \$1,000. We anticipate securing at least two of these sponsors.

At the top level, we will seek a Co-Title Sponsor this year from a business whose name will appear with ours (Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney) in all appearances of the event's name. The Co-Title Sponsor will have the same benefits as core sponsors, as well as a special display in the start/finish area. The Co-Title sponsor will also be given full paid advertising time on Neil Sperry's Texas Gardening radio program, which is very popular in our area and throughout the region. We will ask the Co-Title Sponsor to contribute \$4,000.

Finally, we will offer Myrtle Village (only) sponsorships for \$250 each, which will give businesses a venue to offer a carnival game or other fun event. We anticipate securing six of these sponsors, for a total of \$1,500. (Note: We have not included this amount in the attached revenue budget, choosing a conservative estimate at this point.)

CMT's plans for advertising the *2012 Fun Run and More!* include promotion on McKinney's local radio station (KLAK), as well as on Neil Sperry's *Texas Gardening* program. The Sperry weekend program, which broadcasts on both WBAP frequencies (820 AM and 96.7 FM), reaches 11 metropolitan counties in the DFW area and approximately 10,000 listeners per 15-minute segment over a three-hour period on Sunday mornings.

We will also seek coverage by our local newspaper (*McKinney Courier Gazette*), the Allen and Frisco newspapers, *McKinney Town Square Buzz*, *The Dallas Morning News* and local television stations.

History of CMT Runs

A Crape Myrtle Trails run has been held every year since the first Fun Run in 2006. A video of the 2010 Crape Myrtle Trails Fun Run captures the flavor of this event and can still be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VybGPN6gIKI>.

Fun run participation numbers for all years are as follows:

2006	500 participants
2007	750 participants
2008	750 participants
2009	600 participants
2010	700 participants
2011	650 participants*

**2011 marks the first year that the Fun Run was organized entirely by volunteers, who were learning the ropes in an effort to rebuild the event for future years.*

A summary of the proceeds netted by Crape Myrtle Trails Fun Runs since 2006 is shown below. The funds have been used for McKinney beautification projects and to further the organization's visibility in the community.

2006	\$11,363 net (<i>assisted by MCDC grant of \$2,500</i>)
2007	\$14,595 net (<i>assisted by MCDC grant of \$7,500</i>)
2008	\$12,350 net (<i>assisted by MCDC grant of \$5,000</i>)
2009	\$12,878 net (<i>MCDC grant request denied</i>)
2010	\$5,761 net (<i>No grant monies requested</i>)*
2011	\$6,659.67** (<i>assisted by MCDC grant of \$5,000</i>)

** In a struggling economy, sponsorships in 2010 were hard to obtain. It was participant registration fees that allowed Crape Myrtle Trails to hold the run without any net loss.*

*** \$2,205 of 2011 profits was distributed to participating MISD schools' Physical Education Departments.*

Advancing the Mission and Goals of MCDC

This year's *Fun Run and More!* event will continue to promote pride in our local community, furthering MCDC's goal "to enhance McKinney's aesthetic, cultural and leisure amenities." It has long been CMT's and MCDC's shared goal to help fast-growing McKinney hold onto its strong schools, beautiful park system, tree-lined neighborhoods, and diverse economy and to capitalize on its "Unique by Nature" qualities. We believe MCDC will be proud to have helped lead the way in this pivotal year of CMT's efforts to bring the wonders of McKinney to a wider audience. As noted in the "Promotional" section above, 2012 will be our inaugural year for major efforts to draw significant numbers of participants from neighboring cities and the entire Metroplex.

III. FINANCIAL OVERVIEW OF CRAPE MYRTLE TRAILS OF MCKINNEY

As a young organization, Crape Myrtle Trails does not have a large budget. (Financial reports are attached.) Nevertheless, with effort, CMT has been able to sustain its essential activities even in a tough economy. Revenue comes from three principal sources: the generosity of sponsors, the sale of crape myrtles, and occasional fund-raising events. Sponsors include a number of area businesses, including many who not only contribute to the organization but agree to plant crape myrtles in their areas of town. Others sponsors have supported special events like CMT's past founders' celebrations. In the sale of crape myrtles, CMT partners with North Texas nurseries and also owns an inventory of crape myrtle trees and shrubs valued at \$2,060. This inventory has enabled CMT to make choice selections of crape myrtles available at affordable prices to area schools, churches, and other non-profit organizations.

The CMT Board has recently voted to limit fund-raisers to one major event per year and to put renewed energy into this event as a way of funding the organization's operating budget. Our major fund raising event is the annual fun run, which has been beneficial to the organization financially and also beneficial in increasing awareness of Crape Myrtle Trails and our beautiful city. The fun run also has enabled CMT to form an invaluable partnership with area schools and to develop a fun community/family event with the potential to serve thousands of area residents.

A 2012 Cycle II grant from MCDC will enable Crape Myrtle Trails to continue on its path of growth and visibility as a community asset, contributing not just to city beautification but to the quality of family life in McKinney. In addition, our 2012 event is the beginning of an organized outreach to our neighboring cities as well as the entire Metroplex. As the Trails mature and new tourism efforts build on the beautiful natural assets of McKinney, Crape Myrtle Trails is poised to be an integral part of that growth – and a valuable partner in the community-wide efforts. A generous MCDC grant in 2012 for CMT's *Fun Run and More!* will help make these advances possible.

IV. CMT MARKETING AND OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Two years ago a grant from MCDC made it possible for Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney to print and distribute a beautiful full-color brochure titled "Enjoy the view in our town, McKinney, Texas!" The brochure informed readers about the one city in Texas that is well on its way to having 100 miles of medians showcasing the South's finest summer-flowering tree. It also informed readers about the World Collection Park and the location of the Trails, and it provided readers with tips for growing crape myrtles successfully. A second edition of that brochure is planned, along with a map of the new World Collection Park and other literature related to the new collection.

The official website for CMT, www.crapemyrtletrails.org, was funded by the City of McKinney and is a complete repository of information on the plant, its history, its uses in the landscape, and its culture and maintenance. It is perhaps the best overall source of information on crape myrtles anywhere on the Internet.

Throughout the years, CMT has carried the story of McKinney's Trails and the beauty of crape myrtles to many conferences and special events, ranging from the first-ever conference of the Crape Myrtle Society of America and the Texas Master Gardeners

State Conference to the meetings of dozens of groups across the Metroplex. Neil Sperry regularly promotes Crape Myrtle Trails on his *Texas Gardening* radio program, which airs weekends all year on station WBAP (820 AM and 96.7 FM). Neil Sperry's GARDENS magazine and his *e-gardens* electronic newsletter have generously provided complimentary advertising space to Crape Myrtle Trails events over the years. The magazine reaches 25,000 subscribers; the electronic newsletter reaches more than 33,000.

Crape Myrtle Trails personnel have worked tirelessly to obtain visibility for McKinney and the Trails, and have been rewarded with coverage not just locally and statewide, but nationally and even internationally. Stories have appeared in *McKinney Living*, *The Dallas Morning News*, the on-line magazine *Texas Escapes* and the UK website *Discover America*.

CMT produced and sells a definitive reference poster titled simply "Crape Myrtles." It is an exhaustive chart of all facts a home gardener, nurseryman or landscape contractor would want to have at hand when choosing the proper variety for a specific use. It has been sold worldwide and now hangs in hundreds of nurseries and architectural offices.

Through CMT's website, www.crapemyrtletrails.org, the organization has sold crape myrtle posters to customers from Florida to California. Officials from Duncan, Okla., have toured McKinney and developed similar plans for trails in their own community. Richardson and Allen now make more use of crape myrtles in median and roadway plantings.

Close to home, Crape Myrtle Trails tells its story to the younger generation, presenting programs about crape myrtles and the Trails to school children through the afore-mentioned Mother's Day project. In exchange for local children's Crape Myrtle Fun Run registrations, CMT has awarded up to \$2,205 annually to McKinney ISD physical education programs in past years. In addition, profits from our 2011 run funded our giving over 400 crape myrtle plants to "graduating" 5th grade students the Friday of Mother's Day weekend as a "surprise" gift to their mothers. (The enthusiasm at the campuses was electric!) Our goal is to be able to fund the Mother's Day project for all 17 McKinney elementary schools. By making our run, our park, our city plantings and our traditions with our school children a part of the "fabric" of McKinney, CMT is committed to being a "piece in the puzzle" of McKinney being recognized as one of the very best cities in which to live and/or do business in the country!

V. METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS

Crape Myrtle Trails will evaluate the success of the *2012 Fun Run and More!* based on the number of participants, including the numbers of youths and children drawn from schools in McKinney, Frisco, Allen and beyond. We will also be able to evaluate media coverage and pull numbers from the awards ceremony, food booths, and other post-race activities. At a post-event meeting of the *2012 Fun Run and More!* Committee, we will solicit input from those most involved and will send a full report to MCDC.

CONCLUSION

With sincere appreciation for MCDC's past generous support of its promotional efforts, the Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney respectfully requests a *Fun Run and More!* grant of \$8,000 for 2012. This grant will allow the Crape Myrtle Trails Foundation to play an increasingly effective role in McKinney's tourism and community spirit efforts. Help us help make McKinney the best it can be!