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SAMA-LIGONIER VALLEY GARDENS A MUST-SEE

Ligonier – The gardens at Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art at Ligonier Valley are vibrant and boast a colorful array of flowers. Over the years the gardens have become a key feature of the Museum and are a destination spot for picnics, butterfly watching and wedding and graduation photos. There are five garden beds surrounding the Museum, each showcasing several types of flowers.

Daffodils, forget-me-nots and tulips are some of the more popular flowers that adorn many of the beds. Other flowers, like the peony and hollyhocks, won't bloom until June or July. The gardens are at their peak brilliance from late June through July.

Each garden bed features at least one tree. The curly willow, a tree with curly-cue leaves and twisted branches, is in the gardens in the Museum's front lawn along with weeping mulberries and weeping cherries. A weeping Japanese maple was recently planted in a smaller bed by the front steps. "The trees add a sense of stature to the gardens," said Anne Clark, SAMA's head gardener. "The colors of the trees serve as a nice contrast to the beds. Additionally, the trees help shade some of the flowers during the hot summer months."

Scattered amongst the garden beds are a variety of herbs. Calendula, also called *Mary's Gold*, is a small daisy-like flower. Also featured are pansies, a small delicate flower often with a "face." This flower is used for medicinal purposes and can also be used as a garnish for cold fruits or cream soups. Chives and garlic may also be found in some garden beds.

One of Clark's favorite garden highlights is the bed in the front lawn featuring an arbor. "The arbor adds some structure and drama to the gardens," said Clark. "When it is used for wedding photos, it adds a touch of romance." The arbor features a twisting wisteria vine, which makes it one of the most popular spots for photo-taking.

Clark has been gardening for more than thirty-five years and has spent the last fourteen of those years at SAMA. Her season begins in April when she is busy clearing the gardens and preparing for the summer months. Once the gardens are clear, she begins planting a variety of flowers such as Victoria Blue salvia or amsonia.

Clark's job doesn't end once the seeds are planted. Each week the different garden beds need to be weeded out. Another regular task is removing the dead heads from the flowers.

"I think flowers make people happy," said Clark. "The gardens are a big draw for the Museum and I love seeing people so enthusiastic about them." Clark regularly spends six- or seven-hour days in the gardens and is often accompanied by her youngest Pomeranian, Tiggy.

SAMA's gardens will be in the limelight in late May when the Museum holds its thirteenth annual Garden Party. The Garden Party is SAMA-Ligonier Valley's signature fundraising event and is held among the gardens on the Museum lawn. This year's event will be held on Saturday, May 31 with a theme of "The Thrill of the Hunt for Art." The event will feature live music, elegant cuisine, live and silent auctions and several hunt-related activities. Cost is \$125 per person. Please call the Museum at (724) 238-6015 for tickets or additional information.

If you are interested in learning more about the gardens, SAMA will be hosting a Summer Garden Tour on June 28 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Guests will spend the day touring the beautiful flower gardens and learn about the origin of the Museum's grounds. Clark will be on-hand to answer any questions you may have and to identify the different plants. Cost is \$25 per person. Reservations are required by June 20 and can be made by calling the Museum at (724)-238-6015.

The Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art at Ligonier Valley is located at One Boucher Lane and Route 711 South in Ligonier. Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 1 to 5 p.m. weekends. The Museum is a handicapped-accessible facility and is open to the public free of charge. Please call the Museum or visit www.sama-art.org.