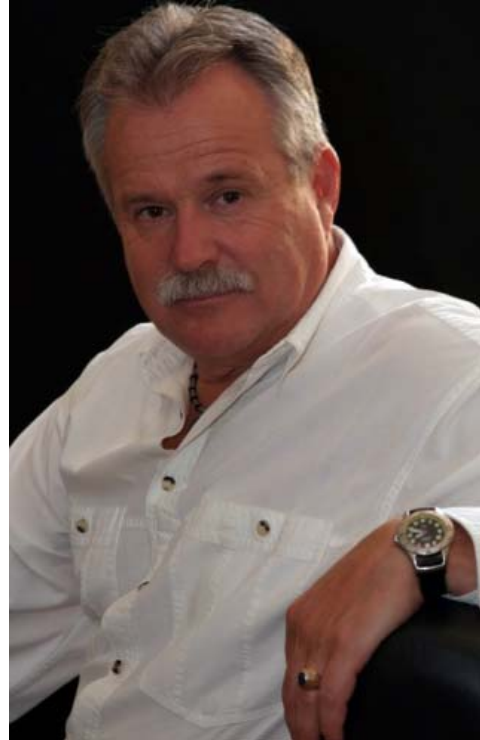


**MAKING A DIFFERENCE:  
MITCHELL L. HEWSON, HTM LT RAHP**

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Some people have a quality that sets them apart. This is the case with Mitchell Hewson, HTM. Many have referred to his special quality as compassion. He uses it daily, as a horticultural therapist working with clients with mental illnesses. For the past thirty-five years, Mitchell has been dedicated to improving the quality of life for this marginalized population, treating hundreds of patients annually using techniques and programs that he has developed.

Mitchell has, as one person referred, “brought beauty from darkness” using plants and gardening activities at Homewood Health Center. Homewood Health Centre, a psychiatric hospital in Guelph, Ontario has patients with a range of issues; post traumatic stress disorder, addictions, eating disorders, affective disorders, dementia, schizophrenia and other mental illnesses.

The first formal program of Horticultural Therapy of its kind in Canada was at Homewood and it continues to be the largest and longest running Horticultural Therapy program in Canada. Mitchell was the first registered horticultural therapist to practice in Canada and it was at Homewood in 1974 that the program was initiated. Under his leadership it has been and continues to be the benchmark for delivering Horticultural Therapy. Through it, Mitchell has demonstrated the therapeutic benefits of incorporating nature into treatment processes. His clinical Horticultural Therapy program utilizes the interdisciplinary team model with his staff working alongside doctors, social workers, occupational and physical therapists, nurses and recreational therapists.

Commenting on the Horticultural Therapy program Dr. E. Perez, Executive Director of Homewood states:

*“Patients at Homewood speak very highly of Mitchell Hewson’s contribution to their lives. In providing mental health care we need to use different approaches to reach our patients. HT brings a very special dimension to care because it combines the use of many of our senses to help us to connect with ourselves, our strength and even our difficulties. It is a great tool for assessment that could be used by many individuals in the field. Being able to plant and grow a seed allows people to nurture the growth with the opportunity to increase one’s self esteem.”*

Mitchell was the first horticultural therapist in Canada to define categories for mental health populations and to present information on their chemical dependencies, medications and diagnostic parameters for use and understanding by horticultural therapists (in his book *Horticulture as Therapy*). He developed models for assessment, CQI forms, procedures, charting methods and therapeutic activities related to goals. This provided the structure and legitimacy for Horticultural Therapy to become a component of an inter-disciplinary team within a clinical setting. Mitchell demonstrated to the Canadian health community, through the program at Homewood, that Horticultural Therapy could be an effective and contributing treatment modality on par with occupational, physical and psychological treatments. Mitchell initiated other applications of Horticultural Therapy as well. At Stonehenge Therapeutic Community for people with chronic and acute addictions, Mitchell was an effective horticultural therapist according to Executive Director Heather Kerr. For many in this population, who had been unsuccessful with traditional therapies, Mitchell was able to make a connection with them using his creative, unique therapeutic style. In addition, Mitchell was instrumental in bringing Horticultural Therapy as an initiative for Alzheimer's patients through the Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program/University of Waterloo. He was keynote speaker at their conference in 2002 in addition to publishing several articles on Horticultural Therapy and dementia and in promoting it as a treatment modality for this population.

Mitchell's role in Horticultural Therapy in Canada is often referred to as pioneering. He was the first to develop a Horticultural Therapy program for eating disorders, another one for people with trauma and addiction (SATS program). Mitchell's book *Horticulture as Therapy: A Practical Guide to Using Horticultural Therapy as a Therapeutic Tool* is currently used as the textbook on Horticultural Therapy in his own courses as well as in Japan. It has been translated into Japanese and Traditional Chinese.

Mitchell's contributions to the professional field of Horticultural Therapy include many innovations. His technique for aromatherapy was groundbreaking, presenting *Incorporating Psycho-aromatherapy into your HT Program* at the '96 MHTA conference. So was his presentation on *Guided Imagery and HT* in 2003. Mitchell's practice, dating back thirty-five years, of utilizing volunteers to support Horticultural Therapy programs, especially with mental health clients, demonstrated the value of a volunteer base and at the same time began to break the stigma of mental illness. The practice of using volunteers to support Horticultural Therapy programs is now a standard that most programs employ. Mitchell has had over 75 articles published on a wide range of topics including;

- *Horticultural Therapy and Post Traumatic Stress Recovery*, Volume XII AHTA Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture (2001)
- *Horticultural Therapy: A Humanistic Approach for Residents With Dementia*, Long Term Care (2001)
- *Using Horticultural Therapy to Improve Quality of Life for People with Alzheimer's Disease*, Journal (the Official Publication of the Ontario Occupational Health Nurses Association) (2002)
- *Using Horticultural Therapy to Improve Quality of Life for People with Alzheimer's Disease*, Health and Gardens (2003)
- *Taking Nature's Path to Recovery: Horticultural Therapy*, Moods: Healing Through Understanding (2004)
- *Recovering With Nature's Help*, Canadian Chiropractor, (2006).
- *Designing a Horticultural Therapy Program for People With Dementia* (2007) and *Horticultural Therapy and Post-Traumatic Stress Recovery* (2008); Growth Point, the Journal of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (UK).

Mitchell has influenced the practice and principles of Horticultural Therapy. He has trained hundreds of horticultural therapists in Canada. They have gone on to establish Horticultural Therapy programs in jails, schools, nursing homes, hospitals and botanical gardens. He has provided training and professional development through various mediums; courses, workshops, internships at Homewood, his book and other articles and presentations at 14 professional conferences. He was amongst the first to teach courses at the post-secondary level in Canada on Horticultural Therapy and he has been on theses juries for the University Of Guelph School of Landscape Architecture. Mitchell has distinguished himself as an educator with both clinical knowledge and creative talent for instilling in others the concepts of Horticultural Therapy. He is credited with being instrumental in developing the profession in Canada by training such a large percentage of the practitioners, gaining institutional support for Horticultural Therapy, consulting on many initial Horticultural Therapy installations, advising on therapeutic garden design and cofounding the Canadian professional association.

Mitchell has significantly influenced the thinking and attitudes about the profession and how it is practiced as a treatment modality both within the field and in other sectors. This is most evident in the number of presentations he has given to social service agencies and health institutions. As the unofficial spokesman for the profession, he has made over 300 presentations to diverse groups, including radiologists, gerontologists, nurses, activity directors, educators, students, service groups, caregivers, Alzheimer conferences, landscape professionals, and garden clubs. Mitchell's unwavering promotion of Horticultural Therapy and its benefits to many special populations has been felt across Canada and beyond.

Travelling to Taiwan and Japan in 1998 and 2001, he presented the concepts of horticultural therapy at six universities to over 2,000 people. According to Yumiko Kan, President of The Japan Horticultural Therapy Council, he is credited with introducing Horticultural Therapy in these countries and igniting the practice of it. Currently in Taiwan there are twenty institutions delivering Horticultural Therapy, five universities with courses on Horticultural Therapy and forty horticultural therapists. All of this activity has been traced to Mitchell's lectures, books and inspiration. Mitchell also travelled to Cuba in 2005 to present with other mental health professionals on programs promoting wellness, including Horticultural Therapy.

Mitchell has also been active in the US, since his initial training at Clinton Valley Center, University of Michigan, in the '70's. He has been invited to speak on a variety of horticultural therapy topics at Colorado State University (98), Denver Botanical Gardens (99), Michigan HT Association conferences (2000, 05 & 08). Mitchell was a Board member of the National Council for Therapy and Rehabilitation. (1978-80). He was a co-founding committee member of the American Horticultural Therapy Association's awards and citations committee. Mitchell has received the Alice Burlingame Humanitarian Award ('93), AHTA Publication Award ('96) and the Rhea McCandliss Professional Service Award ('05).

Mitchell is referred to as the heart and the driving force behind Horticultural Therapy in Canada. He was one of the founders of the Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association in 1987. Recognizing his significant contributions to the professional field, the CHTA created the Mitchell L. Hewson Humanitarian Award as well as making him the only Lifetime member. He continues to be active in this professional association, with the longest service of any member. In

his book *Horticultural as Therapy*, Mitchell comments on the transformation that can come from Horticultural Therapy. He has made a difference in so many lives with his compassionate care, first with mentally ill clients and then with other populations through the practice of Horticultural Therapy by those he has trained, mentored, interned and connected with. Mitchell is truly inspiring in the number of lives he has touched and with the dedication and passion he continues to have for Horticultural Therapy.

*“I have seen before my eyes, the spiritual growth clients undergo. Discovering the wonders of nature can represent a profound change of lifestyle for drug addicts who are learning to feel positive about themselves once more. By nurturing plants and developing an awareness of the environment, they are often then able to give back these newly found skills and renewed energy to their families as well as to the community they once rejected. For people who are elderly there is a rekindling of the desire to live and to do something meaningful. Gardening provides the schizophrenic population with a chance to hold onto reality and to master their environment. The depressed client’s mood is altered in the greenhouse setting. Negative emotions are channelled through a constructive activity which promotes optimism, confidence and self-worth.”*

Mitchell Hewson cited from *Horticulture as Therapy*