

The Brenton Arboretum

July 26, 2001

Dear Friend of the Arboretum:

This is our first newsletter. I hope there will be a least two this year and two next year.

First for a bit of background: The master plan for the Arboretum was created by Tony Tyznik, longtime master planner and landscape architect for the Morton Arboretum. That was in 1996. First planting took place in 1997 and further planting has continued since, with over 1,500 trees and shrubs planted in some 175 groupings.

In 1997 a main road and bridge were built. Last year we constructed a small reception/office space along with a shop and storage area. Buffalograss, blue grama, little bluestem, side-oats grama, and many forbes were planted on approximately 35 of the 119 acres, with another 40 acres or so to plant. Five walking paths were laid out and mowed for the first time in 2000. The goal is to have natural grasses over most all of the arboretum land. We do not plan to plant bluegrass but wish to create a natural effect of trees in a "sea" of native grasses with paths running throughout

In 1999 we hired Andy Schmitz as Arboretum Manager. Andy has a horticulture degree from Iowa State University. He is doing a splendid job caring for the trees, shrubs and grounds. In 2000 C.J. Stephens of Des Moines was hired on a part-time basis to help with our non-financial development outreach to close-by communities, groups, and interested individuals.

In 1998 the Arboretum became a public entity and in 1999 was open to the public five days a week. A board of trustees was organized to give overall direction to our affairs. This board consists of horticultural professionals, area business people and Brenton family members.

In 2001 we have been extremely busy. We have planted about 350 trees and shrubs this spring. It is our goal to grow all Iowa trees and shrubs suitable to our site as well as many other tree species. Soon we will build five foot bridges and will soon excavate to build Lake Homestead, which will be the centerpiece of the Arboretum. In addition to this two-acre lake, two small wetlands will be constructed in 2001. Descriptive signage for our conifer/crabapple/maple walk will soon be in place. The plaques will describe some thirty species. Also, a new brochure displaying and describing the Arboretum is about to go to the printer.

We hope to have all this accomplished by the morning of Saturday, September 22, when the Arboretum will be formally dedicated. A tour will follow. (Consider this an invitation to attend. I really hope you do. The program will start at 10:00 a.m.) In addition to these events we are in discussion with close-by school districts (Dallas Center/Grimes and Adel/Desoto) regarding

the design of tours for school children to the Arboretum in such a way so that the tour fits into the schools' existing curriculum. We hope to have these programs going by fall 2001 or spring 2002 at the latest.

Also, we are conducting a bird survey to determine which species may be seen at the Arboretum throughout the year. This will take a year at best. The results will be printed for those interested in bird watching at the Arboretum.

This year we have also had our share of growing pains and problems. The damage from browsing deer is a concern. We are studying the possibility of enclosing the entire Arboretum with an electric deer fence. We have experimentally enclosed a five-acre area with electric fence and have had good results. Pocket gophers have been a big problem but now are coming under control. Although the site is overall pH neutral, we do have areas that are too alkaline. Some trees will need relocation. Also the disease anthracnose has been hard on our sycamores and some of them need replacing.

This last winter was particularly cold, windy, long and dry with great effect on trees. Sweegum, tulip trees, katsura, sassafras, redbuds, cucumber, magnolia, horsechestnuts and others have been affected. Some trees will be replaced as we find suitable stock. In certain cases we may need to wait until the site is further modified by tree growth before planting species needing more protection.

We are now well along with our Iowa native shrub plantings. I think the viburnum group will be outstanding. We have also begun the planting of many perennials around our building.

A volunteer group has been formed and for that we are grateful. Not only do volunteers do valuable work, they form the nucleus of supporters and friends which all organizations need.

The spring of 2001 has been cool and moist. Depleted moisture in the soil has been replenished. Undoubtedly, though, we will spend much time watering new plantings during the growing season.

So here it is. Quite a bit of news. More than you wish perhaps. However, you are up-to-date and future newsletters can be shorter.

Thank you, dear friend, for your interest in the Brenton Arboretum. Although full of challenge, this endeavor fills one with hope and reward. The Arboretum seeks to make a permanent contribution to the people of central Iowa.

Sincerely,

Buz Brenton, Chairman
The Brenton Arboretum