

August 23, 2002

To our dear Friends of the Arboretum:

The last letter was written back in January. This note I hope will give you some idea of what we are doing and what is on our minds.

Plantings: Last winter was gorgeous and warmer than average. Most of our young trees made it through in splendid fashion. Young trees are like young children; they get sick easily.

Last spring we added about 150 new trees as well as several hundred herbaceous plantings (non woody) about the kiosk and entrance, and last fall many wetland plants in the shallow waters at the northeast end of Lake Homestead. The greatest number of trees planted, by specie, were hedge maple, more pawpaw (still hard to get going) katsura tree, mockernut hickory and shagbark hickory, "Hillspire" eastern red cedar and sweetgum (keep your fingers crossed). Three new small cultivars of crabapple were planted, bringing the total to 78 in 19 cultivars (varieties). Sycamore and replacement quaking aspen were also planted. We also planted English oak again but they died. We will try again. A good deal of the Arboretum has now been planted to the original master plan, with the exception of some Iowa native species which are harder to find. A host of native hybrid oaks is a case in point. We are searching. Native hawthorn would be in the same category. More of all of these will be planted in 2003, as we find them.

This past spring we planted native buffalo and blue grama prairie grass to the south of the new Lake Homestead, thus continuing with our plan of replacing most ground cover at the Arboretum with native grass. But not all. Some brome and alfalfa will be retained for its beauty and significance to Iowa agriculture.

Trails: A very big event for the Arboretum this last spring has been the opening of four walking trails. Attractive (we think) wooden signs mark these trails. This event begins to open up the essences of the Arboretum as a place of quiet enjoyment and tree study. These trails are as follows: The Leaf Walk, which has its own leaf identification brochure; the Conifer, Crab, Maple Walk which has informational signage for 30 species in place; the Iowa Collection Walk and the Oak Walk are also open and will have individual signage or self guiding brochures in the near future. The Valley Trail will also be opening this fall or next spring, when footbridge repair is completed. These trails now allow the Arboretum to be a walking as well as a drive-through, learning experience.

Prairies: The prairies are coming alive! Our buffalo grass and blue grama grass prairie are maturing and are mostly free of early inevitable weeds. They are examples of what homeowners can plant if they wish to have a short, native grass lawn in lieu of traditional blue grass (buffalo grass does take sun). Also, the little bluestem and side oats grama prairie, after burning this past spring, has been a riot of color from the many flowering plants. It's more muted now, as the grasses grow tall. Many species of birds abound in the prairie. Come see!

Wetland: Last spring a one acre wetland was added on newly donated ground adjoining the Arboretum to the north. This will be planted this fall or next spring, and in time, we hope will become a wetland study area for the growing number of school groups coming to the Arboretum.

Education: This past spring the Knee-High Naturalist Program got underway with kindergarten through second grade school children coming to us from the grade schools in Dallas Center, Grimes, Adel, DeSoto and Redfield. The teaching manual, covering ten activities of the program, has now been written. It was financed with a \$9,900 grant from the State of Iowa's REAP program. Ann Riordan, a very experienced field instructor from Menlo, Iowa leads an excellent staff of teachers in what I think is an outstanding learning experience for children, who at this age are terribly enthusiastic and absorb everything. The Knee-High Naturalists Program has been refined this summer with further groups, and will be offered to an expanded school base this fall.

I should also mention that this past spring, current summer and coming fall, for the first time, we have or will offer adult field study covering birding, leaf identification (including conifer), pruning, prairie and crabapple study and tree planting. There will also be a class on creating Christmas gifts from herbs. These field and classroom programs are on-going. Please join us. Dates and times can be found on our website, at the kiosk, or by phone.

Funding: The Arboretum has not solicited general funding but some has come our way. I want to thank Arnold and Caroline Levine, Bob and Marge DeMeulenaere, Warren and Susan Lammert, Triva and Balbir Mathur, and Libby Seaton. Also the City of Adel, donated a vintage fire wagon which we were able to sell. In addition to the grant from Iowa's REAP program we have received a \$222,000 grant from the State's Vision Iowa Program, which helps fund an open air pavilion for our educational programs. Because some requirements attached to this latter grant are difficult for us to meet, we may ask for an adjusted grant with requirements which we can fulfill.

Volunteers: The Arboretum is blessed with a handful of volunteers who help us a great deal. I wish to single out several: Terry Shepherd from Dallas Center is our very experienced ornithologist, who has now completed a 14 month study of birds at the Arboretum. Over 125 species have been identified. With Terry's help, a birding brochure has been created for those who wish a birding experience (often spectacular) at the Arboretum.

This past spring Ron and Peggy Reed, Stan and Jayne Venard, and all Waukee Garden Clubs did a marvelous job planting the many herbaceous plants around our informational kiosk. Also Mike Christman from Waukee has helped extensively in caring for the plants around the building, kiosk and front gate this past spring and current summer. A very time consuming job. A very professional job has been done here. Thank you all.

Dave and Corrine Williams are from Valisca, Iowa. Monthly they drive over fifty miles one way to the Arboretum to help with the trees and grounds. They also have donated books to our small horticultural library. What can I say!

I want to thank all of these marvelous people for their interest, care and professional work. By the way, if you would like to care for a small group of trees or shrubs, please call me or Andy Schmitz at the Arboretum.

Andy: Andy Schmitz continues to serve the Arboretum as general manager and very ably I might add. Last spring, Andy gave presentations around our state centering on his involvement with the evaluation of the extensive tree plantings, which serves as a memorial to the young and old who lost their lives in the bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building. Several of these presentations were in front of large groups of tree and garden professionals, who were attending the Shade Tree Short Course at ISU in Ames. Andy brings great credit to the Arboretum.

Research: Lastly, the Arboretum has entered into explorative discussion with Dr. Jeff Iles, Arboretum board member, and recently appointed Chairman of the Department of Horticulture at ISU, and Dr. Harold Pellett, head of the Landscape Plant Development Center at Shakopee, Minnesota, as to the feasibility of a research project with the Brenton Arboretum. Discussions are focusing on a conifer study. (We lack enough good conifer species for public and private planting here in Iowa). Such a study would take a number of years to complete properly. Practical research is one of the three central missions of the Arboretum. This topic will be taken up by our board of directors soon.

And very lastly, many of you will be receiving an invitation to our formal dedication starting at 10:00 A.M. on Saturday, September 28. If you do not receive one, consider this is our invitation to you. Please come. It should be a beautiful time to see the Arboretum.

Thank you for your interest in this new public arboretum. We hope that it will add a new dimension to our lives here in Iowa.

Sincerely,

J.C. (Buz) Brenton, Chairman
The Brenton Arboretum