

October 2004

Dear Friends of the Brenton Arboretum:

Change is upon us. It is fall. So quickly! Other seasons seem to give us a bit of time in transition. Not fall. One week is summer, the next is fall. Thank heavens it is so delicate, so languorous, and so restful.

The seasonal change, changes me also. Perhaps you too. Attitude, priorities, hopes are altered and then readjusted. Small and subtle, but there.

And so, of course, is the Arboretum affected. The feeling of the place is different. The native grasslands, the trees and leaves, the tiny white asters, the deepening feel of the water. It is a change of color and texture, and for me the arrival of the most beautiful time at the Arboretum. A touch sad but so rewarding to be here!

Swirling around all of this are other changes and plans for this yet quite formative institution. I will briefly enumerate:

Self Assessment: The Arboretum received a small, competitive grant from the American Museum Association to undertake a several year assessment of its internal strengths and weaknesses. This significant undertaking is at the center of our quest for professionalism and excellence as we mature. Directors Mark Kane, Carroll Michalek and Bob German are leading this study.

Pavilion: Finally, and well beyond the time I thought it would take, we have settled on a 1,500 sq. ft. design for a graceful pavilion, which includes a “green” or growing, living roof. We are incorporating a “living roof” to show an example of the efficiencies of conservation and as a teaching tool. It will be built in early 2005 and will be used by school and tour groups as well as our own and members’ functions.

Director: Harry Stine, well-known Dallas County businessman and farmer has accepted a position on our Board of Directors. We all are most pleased about this.

Fence: In July we enclosed the entire Arboretum with a low voltage, electric deer fence. It seems to be keeping the deer out so far. Our fingers are crossed. The deer alter the shape and appearance of many trees as they browse (spring, summer) and rub (fall). It must stop. We are optimistic for its effectiveness and are removing the unsightly wire wrap around about 1,000 trees.

Threshold: Next year we will change the look of our entrance area to include the close planting of twenty-one large trees of several species. We wish to give the visitor a better understanding of what we are about, and also create a feeling of transition between two worlds: one of the road, the farm and the city; the other, the tranquil strength of the Arboretum.

Sculpture: Very soon the Arboretum will install its first sculpture, located just north of the crabapple collection. It will stand nine feet tall and is made of steel. This marvelous piece was created by author, humanist, philosopher and internationally known artist, Fredrick Franck, who resides in Warwick, New York. The sculpture is of St. Francis of Assisi and his birds. St. Francis is well known for his love of animals, birds and the natural world.

Research Project: This summer, Arboretum General Manager Andy Schmitz replaced forty-three very small trees of five species, which did not make it through last winter. This project will last ten years and is intended to identify cold tolerant conifer species not usually grown here. We need to get these young trees established before they can be evaluated.

Spring/Summer Activities: The cool, moist spring and summer have brought forth more than average growth in our plants. This year we have planted about 150 new trees of various species, mainly filling out existing planted groups. We also have planted five acres of prairie grasses, some around the front entrance. As you look at these new plantings, please remember that new prairie appears like a weed patch for the first few years.

Last spring and this fall, we have hosted about 600 young school and pre-school children to our Knee-High Naturalist Program. These classes are ably organized and directed by staff member Kay Meyer. The Arboretum also hosted sixteen adult outdoor classes and walks, from birding to tree planting to volunteer workshops. All of this will be expanded next year.

We have recently installed five hundred permanent identification tree tags, many on slender fiberglass rods. These aluminum tags are the first of several thousand to be placed.

Visitor numbers continue to increase at the Arboretum. Although high attendance is not our primary goal here, we are very pleased to see people driving through and some walking our magnificent trails. This is first and foremost a walking place.

Special Trees: You may want to look at several trees here which might interest you. I will mention only two, but there are many. Both are relatively large trees. The Chinese Pine (*Pinus tabuliformis*) located 100 yards southeast of the west parking area, is very hardy with a beautiful shape. Best of all, it stays a lustrous deep green all year; a real find, I think.

The Amur Corktree (*Phellodendron amurense*) is also a very hardy species. It is developing a beautiful broad, spreading shape. I think it is stunning. Six of them can be found along the east side of the road on the west side of the Arboretum, about halfway down.

Volunteers: Volunteerism is a most important element in our quest for success. We have a handful of active volunteers who help us regularly, whom I lovingly thank. We need many more. I have taken on the job of building this program. If you or someone you know might wish to know about volunteering at the Arboretum, please call me (515-237-5121). We will shape a volunteer activity to the wishes of the individual. You can help me here.

Donors: Although the Arboretum does not solicit contributions, they come in and are most welcomed. As it grows, this institution will need to reach out for general funding, but I have felt it best to withhold active solicitation at this time.

I want to thank the following, and it is from my heart: Warren and Susan Lammert, Tony Tyznik, Julie Brenton, Kay and Bill Pritchard, Jane Brenton-Knauer, the J.N. "Ding" Darling Foundation, Charles Funk, Fred and Emily Weitz, Caroline and Arnold Levine, Marietta Brandt, Jay and Dori Fifield and Linda Appelgate.

Again, and many times over, I want to thank you for your interest in this budding institution. Its process is an odyssey for me, from which I can assure you I will never recover.

Sincerely,

Buz Brenton, Chairman
The Brenton Arboretum

Please note: The Brenton Arboretum is a public institution dedicated to the study of woody plants, offering the public a place for quiet enjoyment; and through its programs and presence, will help people to understand the importance to all of us of the natural world we share together.

If you wish to be deleted from the Newsletter list please let me know.