

March 16, 2004

Dear Friends of The Brenton Arboretum,

This winter of 2004 has brought the Arboretum opportunity, restructure and breathing room: there have been several personnel changes; a serious utility easement threat was eliminated; we are in final stages of planning a beautiful pavilion soon to be built; we learned of a marvelous adjoining land gift to the Arboretum; and we are coming to grips with our significant, emerging role of plant evaluation. There are also a few other matters to tell you about. Let's start with the last of the list first.

Collection and Plant Study: The Arboretum was started with a farsighted and exacting master plan, created in 1996 by Tony Tyznik, our landscape architect. First plantings of about three hundred trees took place in 1997. While not a long time, we are starting to witness and document which plants thrive here in our central Iowa prairie soil, which merely survive or get along, and which do not do well. For example, we are pleasantly surprised to see that Chinese pine, *Pinus tabulaeformis*, grows well and looks beautiful all year long; Tulip-trees, *Liriodendron tulipifera*, get along quite nicely, but red maple, *Acer rubrum* has a tough time of it. We are realizing that a giant experiment is going on here, which, in time, will provide us with the most significant examples and data as to what grows well here in central Iowa and in what types of locations. This information we hope, will be of great public value over time.

As we reach out to include more hard-to-find species of trees and shrubs, we realize more than ever that provenance (the original growing location of the plant) is of vital importance in documentation of growing characteristics and proper evaluation.

In the future it is clear that we will be growing more plants from seed and cuttings in order to insure authenticity and meaningful evaluation. Also, sometimes it is the only way to acquire the plant. This is a most interesting, evolving situation, and, together with our conifer research project, detailed in the last newsletter, makes us more aware than ever of this very central role of the Arboretum.

New Land: Very recently, Harry Stine, an Iowa farm boy (as he says), Dallas County farm owner, plant breeder, and owner of Stine Seed Farms, has offered to give the Arboretum about fifteen acres of land adjoining us on the southeast. This land will be incorporated into our present 122 acres. It is a very, very interesting piece of ground, with different facing slopes and excellent protected areas. A stream which also bisects the Arboretum runs through it.

These new protected areas will better allow us to grow certain species needing shelter from our harsh conditions, which should moderate over time. The new land also gives us more moist planting areas, which are very favorable for some species. Part of it is also naturally wooded.

Harry is a tree man, a gentleman, generous, of course, and an excellent table tennis (ping-pong) player. After his welcomed offer, he thrashed me at two games there in his office area. I went away with mixed emotions, but not really. Thank you, Harry.

The Pavilion: We are preparing to start building a pavilion/shelter house on the west side of the Arboretum overlooking Lake Homestead. It will seat 80 – 100 people and be enclosable. This building will give our educational classes, our guests and our future members (a group we hope to start organizing soon) a much needed place to convene. Part of the pavilion's cost will be born with a grant from Iowa's C.A.T. grant program and part from the Brenton Foundation. This structure will be a very important step for us.

Power Line Easement: MidAmerican Energy, our power company, proposed to build a 345kv electric transmission line (the largest allowable in Iowa), with very large metal poles, along the south side of the Arboretum. I saw this as a real threat to the future growth and public value of the Arboretum, and hired council. Many affected landowners in Dallas and Guthrie counties joined with us – and we with them - in opposition. The line was eventually redirected to the south of us along their existing right-of-way. This threat is over, but there will be others. Our location, which is in the direct path of a rapidly developing area immediately west of Des Moines, is too valuable to be left in a rural state for very long.

People Changes: Anne Riordan, head of our Knee-High Naturalist program, a part-time job, has left us to assume a full-time job of permanent status with the DNR at Springbrook Nature Center, an opportunity not to be passed up for her. She will continue to advise and train our teachers.

Amanda Benbow, outreach and adult educational director, also a part-time job, has established her own animal and nature photography business in Urbandale; a life long dream for her. She will continue to teach for us.

I feel so fortunate that Mark Kane of Des Moines, a director of the Arboretum and former garden editor of Better Homes and Gardens magazine is picking up these duties. As those of you who know him realize, Mark is an unusually capable and imaginative man and I thank him for his help. I also wish to thank Anne and Amanda for their great contribution to the Arboretum. They will always remain part of our Arboretum family.

I will try to bring this letter to a close but several more matters remain to mention briefly:

Adult Education 2004: This year our schedule of events has grown and I enclose it. Please take a look at what might interest you. I hope you and your friends can join us.

Contributions: I must and wish always to thank those who contribute to our efforts. Although we do not solicit our friends, this help is important.

Andy Schmitz: Starting in mid-February, Andy, our general manager, assisted by Larry Myers, is hard at work pruning trees and shrubs. He is also closing up our plant ordering for Spring 2004 planting. This latter job is made increasingly more complex as he seeks to find less available plants from fewer and fewer sources. No doubt soon we will be growing plants for the Arboretum from seed or finding them in the wild.

Deer Fence: In all probability, we will ring the Arboretum with a very low power electric fence to keep deer out. The deer browse our plants in the spring and summer, and rub them in the fall, which strips their bark. This must stop.

Prairie: This spring we will plant an additional five acres of prairie grasses and wild flowers. One area will be around the entrance. As you may know, we wish to have a natural appearance throughout. While weedy at first, these prairies are well worth the effort because of their lasting beauty.

Volunteers: Mike Christman, head of volunteers, has developed quite an extensive program for recruitment and training of volunteers. We need volunteers. Please take a look at our web site (www.thebrentonarboretum.org) or call Mike at the Arboretum if you wish to consider being a volunteer.

Once again, I thank you for your interest in the Arboretum. It cannot be sustained over time without you.

Sincerely,

Buz Brenton, Chairman
The Brenton Arboretum