

October 2006

Dear Charter Members and New Found Friends,

Ten years ago in April 1997, the first tree was planted at the Brenton Arboretum. It was a white spruce (#97-001). About three hundred trees were planted that first year. I was sixty-one with a lot of energy.

The steps leading to tree planting that spring were many. Here is a short summary:

Two years earlier I looked all over Central Iowa for a place to establish an arboretum, something I had been thinking about for a long time. I found that place on my ancestral family land, acquired in 1853. I was not sure if the idea had merit. How should I proceed?

My first call was on Ann and Bob Fleming of Carlisle, very knowledgeable, civic minded and wise plant people. They gave me encouragement and some advice. I next called on Bob and Fran Bickelhaupt of Clinton, who had retired from business early and started the beautiful Bickelhaupt Arboretum. They energized me and told me how to proceed. They were adamant that before anything else a master plan would be needed. They suggested that I call Tony Tyznik of Batavia, Illinois, who had recently retired as landscape architect of the world famous Morton Arboretum, west of Chicago. I was lucky. He had the time and agreed.

The master plan was completed in 1996. Trees were planted the next year. A non-profit foundation was established. I asked Pam Nagel of Des Moines, horticultural professional, to assist me with locating the trees. She helped a lot. Still feeling uncertain, I called on Jeff Iles, then I.S.U. Extension horticulturalist and professor. He assured me, gave me confidence and agreed to be a founding board member. My wife, Sue, and I then assembled other board members. We had our beginning.

In a year or two I hired Andy Schmitz, a new ISU horticultural school graduate, to manage this affair. C.J. Stephens became a part-time educational director and established the now very successful Knee-High Naturalist program. A few volunteers joined us. Arnold and Caroline Levine of Des Moines made a cash contribution, the first. That someone would see social value here enough to give money gave new encouragement.

And here we are. Ten growing seasons later; growing trees and shrubs; building infrastructure; establishing educational programs; starting a modest research project; creating a volunteer group and finally launching a membership program of which most of you are our first members. An impressive group of 250 charter members, you bind everything together. What can I say but “thank you”!

## Now Let's See What Is Going On Today:

On the afternoon of September 30<sup>th</sup>, a beautiful day, we held our first membership gathering. There were about fifty people there. After a tour, Tony Tyznik, our landscape architect all through the years, gave a talk about his philosophy and planning for the Arboretum. We ended with an hour of socializing and departed by 6:30. It was successful, I believe. We will do it again next year.

### The Trees

There was much new growth this past summer. Conditions were good. After ten years, smaller and larger trees planted at the same time are about equal in size. This amazes me but you can see it.

One totally new grouping was planted this spring: Yellowhorn, *Xanthoceras sorbifolium*. Michael Dirr, in his Manual of Woody Landscape Plants calls it “a striking tree but virtually unknown in commerce and garden”. Yellowhorn grows to 24 feet, has compound, lustrous green leaves, with striking spring flowering. It is native to Northern China and can be found at the Arboretum on the west side of the road by the administration building. These six trees are very small and are worth watching.

I would like to point out the European Larch, *Larix decidua*. This large grouping of ten- to twenty-foot trees is found just after entering the grounds and right behind the reception kiosk. What a difference a few years can make. These once sorry saplings have become vigorous and impressive with a light and airy quality. Branches are slender and ascending. The profuse leaves are very narrow and pointed. At one point, we were close to taking them out. What a mistake that would have been. This species is worthy of your consideration.

### Construction

Plans are afoot to build a new bridge just below the dam at Lake Homestead. This will allow for easier access east-west across the stream and particularly open up access to the expanding special elm collection.

Now that we have established a walking path around Lake Homestead, we will build a platform with a seating area and perhaps a boardwalk over shallow water to better observe the profusion of plants and aquatic life along the bank and in the water.

After a number of uses, it is quite apparent that the pavilion is outstanding in functionality, design, and vista. Remember, only members can rent the pavilion. Plantings on the green roof have a long way to go, however, as does the ground covering around the building. These problems will be solved.

### Classes

This year we have had more adult classes than ever before and more K-2 school groups. Our staff is stretched. Over the spring, summer and fall 1,195 children attended the outdoor classes.

### Critters

I thought you might like to know about our battles with the natural world, which we love. They are mainly animals: We have battled pocket gophers from the beginning. In addition to mound building, they eat roots of trees and have probably killed a dozen or so trees over the year. We attempt to control them. Rabbits are becoming a growing concern. There were none at first. They girdle the bark of or chew young saplings. Mice also girdle very small saplings in winter, thus killing them. Deer have been our worst problem. They sculpt young trees in spring by eating new growth. The bucks rub their antlers against trees in the fall and can kill them. We have lost a dozen or so trees this way and now have a deer fence around most of the Arboretum. It works pretty well. Groundhogs create larger holes in the ground for their tunnels, thus making walking hazardous. We fill the holes as we find them. Now the beaver have found us. They girdled one pin oak which died. It's a war out there!

### Contributions

The people who support us help us yearly with more than their money. These unsolicited expressions are recognized here: Bevington Garden Club, Kaye Condon, Jay and Dori Fifield, Robert Fulk, Virginia Galbraith, Wayne H. Geadelmann, Mary Hays, James Hubbell Jr., John and Ellen Hunter, the Kruidenier Charitable Foundation, Inc., Susan Kuker, Warren B. Lammert, Jr., Carolyn O'Brien, Elizabeth Owens, Bill and Kay Pritchard, Elizabeth K. Seaton, Leah Trent, Anthony Tyznik, Tom and Mary Urban, Fred and Emily Weitz, and Roger and Janis Winterhof. They have my deepest appreciation.

### The Future

We have many decisions before us. Do we add a new building or wing to house classes, offices, etc.? Do we lean more toward native woody plants or plant interesting cultivars and ornamentals? What use do we make of our new 20 acres of Stine land, adjoining to the southwest? How do we give visitors a better understanding of where to go and what to see, and yet allow for a sense of discovery? How do we keep the feeling of serenity and quiet as more people visit? How shall we handle eventual management succession and a growing budget? What marvelous problems we have!

Well, this is enough! I wish to say "thank you" more genuinely than my words can express. If we were together, you would see it in my expression.

Sincerely,

Buz Brenton

Also, we want you to know that Frederick Franck, who forged our sculpture "St Francis and His Birds", died in May. He was one of the great men in Sue's and my life.