

October 2007

Dear Members and Friends,

With the passing of this year, the Brenton Arboretum begins a new chapter. We are in our eleventh year of existence. What do we wish for the time coming?

We are now a 140-acre Arboretum with over 2,000 plantings in a natural appearing landscape. Most of our trees and shrubs are unaltered by horticultural cultivation or breeding.

One of our pursuits coming up will be to introduce more varieties of many species which display appealing characteristics of size and shape, leaf color and venation, shade tolerance and disease resistance. These hybrids and cultivars are seen throughout our cities both in public and private places. They add richness to our lives and are the majority of trees planted today.

The question for us now is how far should we go with this? It is a welcomed dilemma. We do wish to display appealing trees and shrubs which the public will enjoy and be able to use, as many if not most arboreta do. At the same time we see great benefit in displaying native trees and shrubs (native to Iowa and beyond) which allow an understanding of where all these varieties come from, and what the originals look like. For many species, it is increasingly only in the diminishing "wild", where they grow naturally, that they can be seen and studied. This makes their inclusion in arboreta even more important.

Where should the balance be? Our growing knowledge and limited resources are a part of this. Please give us your input and stay tuned.

Now that the basic structure of the physical Arboretum is well set and easily evident, a second question must be asked. What emphasis should we place on special collections and physical features? We now have, or plan to have, special elm, Osage orange, crabapple and oak collections. Our constructed native prairies are certainly special. The pavilion, children's play area, and water platform (now under construction) are special. We have one large sculpture and one large interpretive sign. How much of this can we have and still retain the quiet, contemplative, natural feel that we seek? The Arboretum as a place of quiet enjoyment is central to our mission. What is the balance? We do not want to diminish the visual tranquility of this space, with its vistas, but we do want to offer an interesting, educational experience to the visitor. We do not wish to become cluttered. Where is the balance? Your thoughts please.

These matters are very much on our minds and under discussion.

Now to a few other matters:

Construction: We have completed a fourth trail bridge across the east branch of Hickory Creek which further connects the east and west sides of the Arboretum. In particular, it gives easier access to our elm and buckeye collections on the west side.

The water platform, with seating and sunscreen, is finally under construction. I am sure it will be used by the general public as well as our young class members. It will be quite visible and easily accessed.

A new portable toilet has been installed in the parking area by the pavilion. It is handicapped accessible and has attractive wooden screening.

Next year we are planning to construct a meeting room, office, bathroom, storage and library adjacent to our present building. This will double our heated space. Our increased activity demands these additions.

Library: Our small library is growing. We plan to properly classify the books, better display them and make them more accessible to our public.

Membership: We recently held a wonderful meeting of members with about sixty present. After a tour, Dr. Edward Hasselkus, one of our country's leading plantsman, gave a very interesting and useful lecture about desirable woody landscape plants. This was followed by refreshments. We will do this again. Membership is so important for us.

Planting: About 120 trees and shrubs were planted this year, with five new groupings as detailed in the April newsletter. More, of course, next year. Growing conditions have been excellent this past summer.

Elm: We have collected about 80 small elm trees representing 24 elm species. Most of the species are originally from Asia. More will be coming. These will be planted out in our collection or in rows for observation. In addition to the loss of American elms over the past fifty years, and now with the possible death of most all ash trees, which is happening in states east of Iowa, new elm species we feel will become more important. The elm collection is a major undertaking for us and will be found nowhere else displayed in such breadth.

Education: This year we held sixteen adult field classes and received over one thousand children. We will put more resources toward our children's educational classes during the next few years. Giving young people an "outside" experience will help shape their attitudes toward the connection between the natural world and their own well being; their own lives.

Numbers: So far this year our gate count shows in excess of 2,000 visitor cars, an increase from last year. Our website use has soared, over 5,000 in August. Our attendance at both adult and children's classes is slightly up. I report these numbers to you for your information, but must tell you that we try to stay out of the numbers game. We do want to be well used, but feel that what we do and the care with which we do it is much more important than our statistics. We do not wish to measure our success predominantly by numbers.

Donations: Beyond membership, I wish to thank the following who have contributed to us. We could not expand our breadth without these most appreciated gifts.

Garth and Cheryl Adams, Anonymous, Marietta Brandt, Woody Brenton, Bob and Babette Brenton, Julie Brenton and Family, Patty and Jim Cownie, Bob and Marge DeMeulenaere, Duben Living Trust, Cathy and William Eddy, John and Jane Eddy, Catherine Elliot, Jay and Dori Fifield, Charles and Connie Funk, Virginia F. Galbraith, Wayne and Ann Geadelmann, Mary Hays, Alan and Denise Holck, Harriet Hubbell Edwards Trust, James Hubbell Jr., Dave and Barb Hurd, Indianola Garden Club, Elizabeth Kruidenier, Warren B. Lammert Jr., Robert Larsen, Richard Levitt, Carroll and Rick Michalek Dwight Murken, Cathy O'Brien, Cynthia O'Brien, Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., Charles and Judy Rhinehart, Craig and Liz Sandahl, Tom and Kitty Stoner, Leah Trent, Anthony Tyznik, Tom and Mary Urban, Fred and Emily Weitz, Krenio Wright, and Violet G. Young Charitable Trust.

Many, many thanks once again to you, our members. You are at the center of our well-being.

Sincerely,

Buz Brenton

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