

April 15, 2007

Dear Members and Friends,

The Brenton Arboretum is now ten years old. The first tree, a white spruce (97-001) was planted in May 1997.

And here we are: trees, prairies, roads, buildings, programs, members, staff, volunteers, a board of directors, additional land, and most importantly, continuing to sharpen our definition of what we are and what we wish to be. We evolve as we gain experience. This goes on forever.

What we are is a 140-acre Arboretum given over to public use, education and research. Our aim is to direct most of our energies toward those people who wish to learn and be out-of-doors, love woody plants and will, if physically possible, walk the land so as to feel its presence, and understand what is around them.

This goal limits our audience, for not everyone wishes the intimate experience of being on the land, energized by the world of trees, shrubs and grasses. In fact, society is moving the other way; moving indoors with “virtual” pursuits. We will work at reversing this alarming trend, and enticing more people out-of-doors, out of their cars if possible, to learn and to feel a part of this increasingly fragile world that ultimately protects all of us. Our goal then is to increase awareness of the complexity and interdependence of the natural world. This we do through our setting, our trees, our educational programs and walks. At ten years of age, this is where we are.

Now let me tell you what is going on.

**Water Platform:**

We are in the final steps of designing a water platform jutting out over the water of Lake Homestead. We wish to give all our visitors an excellent way to be near the profusion of life in and around the water. The platform will be built this summer and will include seating and shade. It will be a very short walk from the main road.

**New Bridge:**

A new footbridge will soon be built. It is about in the middle of the Arboretum, north to south, and will better connect our walking paths across the main stream and in particular allow easier access to our expanding elm collection.

### **A Possible New Special Collection:**

For several years now, Guy Sternberg, world-renowned tree expert from Springfield, Illinois, has encouraged us to expand our Osage-orange, *Maclura pomifera*, collection. This would include ten to twelve new varieties which would be acquired through the John Pair Horticultural Center of Kansas State University. These new types look quite different from the Osage-orange we see in Iowa. They would be smaller, thornless and non-fruiting. They are highly disease resistant. We think they might be quite pleasing in shape and suitable for home planting. If approved by our Collections Committee, this grouping would be a new, special collection, and one not seen anywhere else.

### **Pavilion:**

This season will be our first full year of use for our pavilion. In addition to classes and general gatherings, it can be used by members for personal gatherings.

The pavilion's unusual, green roof has been less than satisfactory so far. Almost all of the plants have died. The roof will be replanted this spring.

### **Membership:**

Our membership now stands at 220. Most of you have recently received renewal letters from me. We are very pleased with our membership after one year. You, our members, are of great importance to our sustainability. Please stay with us.

### **Kay Meyer:**

In January Kay Meyer, who has worked here part-time for several years made the jump to full-time. She is in charge of education, membership, volunteers, and outreach. I am very pleased about this. Kay is a very gifted person who has and will do great things for us. She is currently planning for the arrival of many school children this spring.

### **Walking:**

Not everyone in the world loves to walk, but this is how we encourage you to see the Arboretum. We have designed our various walking paths as easy loops, allowing you to quickly get back to where you started, if needed. I really hope you will take a short walk here, or a long one. For those who cannot walk, we, of course, provide the auto tour.

### **A Bird:**

The big news this winter was the sighting by Arboretum manager, Andy Schmitz, of a Hoary Redpoll. This was a very big event. This sparrow-sized bird has been documented only a few times in Iowa. It is found in the Arctic, Canada, Alaska and the north part of our northern states. Several hundred birders came from across Iowa and other states to see this bird. The Arboretum was in the local and national press regarding the redpoll. The single bird stayed with us several months, feeding on the seeds found in the catkins of our European Alders. Along with the seeds, it may have been attracted to the availability of water and shelter at the Arboretum.

The creation of good birding habitat is very important to us. Please come to one of our bird walks to see the many species and numbers we find.

**Classes:**

Enclosed is our 2007 schedule of adult classes and events. I hope you can join us.

**Planting:**

This year we are planting four new groups of trees:

Sweet Cherry Birch, *Betula lenta*, is a 40' to 50' tree with lustrous, dark green leaves, has excellent fall color and resists the bronze birch borer.

Turkish filbert, *Corylus colurna*, is a 40' tree which, according to Michael Dirr in his Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, has an "excellent formal character and is a very little used and under appreciated tree in the U.S."

Vernal Witchazel, *Hamamelis vernalis*, is a small multi-stemmed tree that can be used effectively in groupings.

Meyers Spruce, *Picea meyeri*, a tree from Northern China, quite similar to our blue spruce in shape and foliage, but fewer disease problems.

**Conifer Research Project:**

We have now had four winters of experience with this project, the purpose of which is to find seldom used conifers that will grow well in our climate. Of the twelve species, Shawnee Brave®, Common Bald Cypress, Japanese Larch, Frazer Fir and Korean Fir are the trees seemingly doing the best so far. This is, however, a ten-year project and results may change.

**Contributions:**

Each year individuals send us contributions, which are unsolicited. I am very thankful for this encouragement and funding. The fall newsletter will list these most appreciated individuals.

Thank you for being a member, and for your interest. Without you we would be a lesser institution. As it is, our prospects of becoming an outstanding regional arboretum are bright.

Sincerely,

J. C. (Buz) Brenton