

October, 2009

Dear Members and Friends,

I have been accused of restating our mission and purpose frequently and this is so. Focus is what this organization needs to survive and flourish. So I concentrate on it. Here I go again:

This Arboretum is intended to be a quiet, restful place. A place for touring, walking and meditating, with few outside distractions. Our goal here is to maintain a landscape design and management so that the Arboretum always will be a place of “quiet enjoyment.”

The world needs people who understand the singular importance of the natural world, and how we are connected to it in all ways. Therefore, education about this elemental fact, for both young and old, is that in which we wish to be involved. It is my belief that without these basic understandings, we will stray from making decisions which result in a habitable planet. It starts with education. We will do our small part.

There are few places similar to The Brenton Arboretum with so many types of trees and shrubs. In a sense, this is quite a unique living laboratory. It is full of examples. Some thrive better than others.

We all are interested in what thrives; what works. We aim to show it here. Our goal, therefore, is always to be a place to show and learn about woody plants. This includes evaluation, select research of two species: Kentucky Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioicus*) and Osage-orange (*Maclura pomifera*), and our large elm collection.

Also, this Arboretum is designed to be an example of land conservation: prairies, streams, ponds, thickets, and contours; a natural setting. We hope people will experience the physical Arboretum to further their understanding of land conservation.

These are our goals. I probably will write about them again.

This twice-yearly newsletter is intended to bring members up-to-date on what is happening here which is of interest. Here goes:

Lake Homestead: In September, we dredged the small “Tear Drop” part of the lake lying to the east of the auto bridge after entering the Arboretum. Silt was filling in the area. In order to protect the main body of the lake from siltation, we took this action. This was the designed intention of “Tear Drop.” Messy! Expensive!

2009 Plantings: We planted about 100 trees and shrubs last spring. Five years ago we were planting many more, but now we have just about completed our original plan for the Arboretum. The one remaining unplanted larger area is located beyond the gate on the west side. Our master plan calls for a reception center and parking area there, so we have left it alone for now.

We did plant two new groupings. One group consisted of five ‘Whitespire Sr.’ Gray Birch, (*Betula populifolia* ‘Whitespire Sr.’) located at the northwest corner of Lake Homestead. This beautiful cultivar is supposed to be more resistant to the bronze birch bore. It was researched and promoted by Dr. Ed Hasselkus, of Madison, Wisconsin, a guest speaker here two years ago and a valued advisor.

Five Shumard Oaks (*Quercus shumardii*) were also added to our growing oak collection. This large oak species is typically found south of Iowa, but we are hoping.

Ground Cover: We have noticed that the buffalo and blue grama grasses, planted in 1998 on the west side of the Arboretum, are getting weedy. The buffalo grass, a native to western Iowa and adjacent western states, is just not thriving in this area of a cooler and more moist climate. It requires more mowing and weed control than was anticipated. After some research, we have inter-seeded, on a test basis, three acres with grasses more adaptable to our area. This should give us a thicker, healthier stand of turf and still be natural in appearance. If successful, we will inter-seed more of our twenty acres of buffalo and blue grama grasses.

Species Expansion: We have decided to double the area dedicated to our special Osage-orange and Kentucky Coffeetree collections. Manager Andy Schmitz has collected seeds for the Kentucky Coffeetree in the Midwest and cuttings for the Osage-orange in Kansas. After growing in pots for two years, the best examples of these species will be planted out. This will show, in one place, the diversity in appearance and perhaps growing habits of each species. When completed, these examples will be found nowhere else as groups. At that point we will apply to become a member of the North American Plant Collection Consortium and designated, we hope, as the only or as an official repository for these two species.

Deer Fence: In 2003 we installed an electric deer fence around the original Arboretum of 120 acres. The five rope strands of five-foot fence pretty much keep the deer out of our area. One strand is baited. Deer train themselves away from the fence; once or twice touching the bait and being mildly shocked. It is a minimal cost fence and has proven quite effective in keeping deer from destroying some of our more delicious species including elm, sassafras, willow and hickory.

Classes, Outings and Music: The Arboretum has concluded a rather successful season of field classes for children from kindergarten through second grade, coming from seven surrounding towns, including Des Moines. This is our Knee-High Naturalist program. Kay Meyer, our Director of Education also hosts monthly “Nature Club” gatherings of about thirty children. We also offered fourteen outdoor classes and gatherings for adults. These ranged from pruning and birding to planting and pond study.

On August 29th, about 150 individuals attended our second and quite successful, chamber music concert. The Polaris Wind Quintet, playing a varied program, was very well received. We will do more of this.

New Grades: Next year, for the first time, Kay will offer on a test basis our Knee-High Naturalist program to school children from third through fifth grades. These classes will be designed primarily for the study of trees and shrubs. They will, of course, fall within the school curriculum guide lines.

Membership Meeting: On Saturday afternoon, October 3rd, we held our membership gathering at the pavilion. It was a chilly and windy day, with 35 members in attendance. A walk with Guy Sternberg, from Starhill Forest Arboretum, preceded his discussion about oaks. Sternberg is one of our country's most eminent arborists. He specializes in oaks of the world.

Gifts: I wish to thank the following people who made contributions to the Arboretum beyond their memberships. As most of you know, we do not solicit funds, but we do gladly accept them. Our goal is to cover one-half of our operating expenses from sources other than the Brenton family. We are above twenty-five percent and growing.

Garth and Cheryl Adams, Lisa and Andrew Bean, Nickolee Boyer, Marietta Brandt, Julie Brenton and R.D. Galbraith, William Brenton Jr, Hilary Brown and Arthur Orduna, Pat and Phil Brown, Jen and Dave Burkett, Kay Condon, Leona and Ralph Conner, Bob DeMeulenaere, Cathy and William Eddy, Jane and John Eddy, John Elken, Bob German, Catherine Kirk and Tim Elliot, Anonymous, Wayne Geadelmann, Julia Gentleman, Corinne Hubbell, Helen Hubbell, Barb and Dave Hurd, Iowa Woodland Owners Association, Susan and Jeffrey Kuker, Warren Lammert Jr, Robert Larsen, Jeff Larson, Tracy Levine, Richard Levitt, Carroll and Rick Michalek, Dwight Murken, Judith and John Nicholson, Carolyn O'Brien, Cynthia O'Brien and Mike Fitzpatrick, Mary Anne and Bob Rennebohm, St. Pius Catholic School, Kitty and Tom Stoner, Anthony Tyznik, Emily and Fred Weitz, Linda and Steve Weitz, and Mary Beth and Melvin Wilk.

In conclusion, thank you all for your interest in the Arboretum. Without you as individuals and as a collective constituency, we could not be vibrant and flourishing.

Sincerely,

Buz Brenton