

Funding Update:

“Save the Azaleas” Campaign

Harold Belcher—Cheverly, Maryland

In May, Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) invited stakeholders of the U.S. National Arboretum to a meeting updating them on the status of funding of the “Save the Azaleas” campaign.

It was reported that the retail portion of the campaign has raised about \$40,000, mostly through small donations. The Friends of the National Arboretum Board agreed to bear the expenses of the campaign which totaled \$17,000 to date. No fundraising expenses have come out of the funds donated to the campaign.

The \$1 million endowment has produced income of approximately \$28,000. Friends of the National Arboretum now plans to reach out to high income individuals and corporate donors for support. They are confident about reaching their funding goal.

Friends of the National Arboretum has requested assurances from the U.S. National Arboretum that the money provided through the fundraising campaign be used solely for the affected collections. Arboretum staff have said at least \$100,000 per year needs to be provided before that assurance will be given.

Dr. Colein Hefferan, director of the U.S. National Arboretum, spent about an hour answering questions, outlining some of the Arboretum’s current and future projects and providing insight into their efforts to care for and support their collections. She informed us that the Arboretum is not going to de-accession the undocumented azaleas on the Glenn Dale Hillside or the Boxwood and Perennial Collections and is working to maintain its collections for as long as possible. Unfortunately, it appears that the Arboretum will face reduced funding for FY 2012.

Dr. Hefferan opined that fundraising is difficult. The Arboretum needs to generate ideas to further engage the public with U.S. National Arboretum functions, collections, and opportunities. She would like to discuss plans and potential changes to save money, or increase revenues, with stakeholders before decisions are made.

She mentioned that the most visited collections at the Arboretum are: the Azalea Collection, the Bonsai Exhibit, and the Asian Valley. People come to the Arboretum to see what they enjoy.

An ASA representative mentioned that members of the ASA and ARS working with the Curator of the Azalea Collections, could probably identify the undocumented Glenn Dale azaleas given the opportunity. Dr. Hefferan indicated that it may not be necessary to name them (the undocumented Glenn Dale azaleas) in order to appreciate and maintain them.

ASA and ARS members are currently involved with other

arboreturns and collections of azaleas and rhododendrons to correct the names of, and correctly identify, plants. These efforts assist in increasing public awareness and opportunities for educational experiences. Dr. Hefferan indicated that the Arboretum would use the \$8,000 that FONA has been keeping since 1992 for signage in the Glenn Dale Collection for that purpose.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the stakeholders expressed a sense that things at the Arboretum seem to be moving in the right direction. Dr. Hefferan appears genuinely interested in working with the stakeholders to solve some of the Arboretum’s problems and to involve stakeholders in the Arboretum’s decision-making process concerning the resolution of those problems.

Harold Belcher began his appreciation for azaleas while working at Dr. Wilbur Engleman’s azalea nursery in Lanham, Maryland, during his high school years (1961 -1964). He graduated from the University of Maryland with a business degree in 1970. Harold worked for the Navy Department and the Department of Justice and retired from Federal government service in January 2009. He is a past four-term president of the Ben Morrison Chapter of the ASA and former ASA board member. Harold has been a resident of Cheverly, Maryland, all his life and has enjoyed visiting the U.S. National Arboretum since 1960.



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