

Friends of
Laurelwood Arboretum
Connecting People with Nature



2020 Year in Review



From the President

Dear Friends,

Where do I begin to describe our 2020 season?



Under normal circumstances, a good place to start would be at the beginning. However, even before our 2020 season began, the pandemic was upon us. All of us. And all of you. Although the impact of the health crisis was and continues to be far worse on many other sectors and individuals in our community, most of our programs were cancelled and our buildings closed for the season. For the first time ever, Laurelwood Arboretum itself was closed for three weeks in the spring.

But our commitment to the public to provide a place of respite from the stresses that we all have been feeling was a strong motivator. We had work to do and we had to figure out how to do it...

Community Outreach

So, how DO you do community outreach during a pandemic? With a little creativity. Our annual plant sale was a priority, since it is always a favorite and we had plenty of plants propagated over the winter and ready for sale. Linda Wescott did the hard work of figuring out how to hold the plant sale safely, and she and her team were off to the races. It turned out to be just as



successful as last year, which is remarkable only if you don't believe in the curative power of gardening. We also organized a virtual art and photography show, with artwork inspired by



or created in the arboretum, which we posted on our website. Credit and thanks go to Alice Moskowitz and Bonnie Joachim for the idea, and Lourdes Osorio and one of her students for the execution. Lourdes also conducted a Zoom presentation for our members on how to have a native plant garden without (too much) deer

damage. It was quite popular, and we hope to do more of them. We had a couple of Eagle Scout projects in the arboretum, with the installation of a variety of wildlife boxes to offer



protection to threatened species. As we became more comfortable operating within our safety protocols, we partnered with the Town to offer supervised walks in the arboretum through the Mayor's Wayne Walks program. Lakeland Bank volunteers

joined our staff to landscape our new Propagation Greenhouse garden bank, with Lakeland donating the funds to purchase the plants. And weddings, so many weddings! Couples were forgoing big, indoor weddings this year, and the arboretum offered a wonderful out-of-doors



setting for more intimate wedding celebrations. In these ways, we managed some community outreach.



Focus on the Arboretum

But, without the ability to hold many of our REGULAR community outreach programs, we focused our energies on the

arboretum itself, working to make it as beautiful and welcoming as we could. We replaced the gravel paths in the Sensory Garden with concrete, making it more accessible for wheelchairs



and strollers and ending the need to refurbish the paths after every rainfall. In keeping with the rustic nature of the arboretum, we installed new hand-carved wayfinding signs throughout the arboretum, so now our visitors will know



where they are and how to exit. Our new and more consistent signage, brochures and notices added to the neater look of



the notice board, the parking lots and the whole welcome area in the front of the arboretum.

Gary Molan and Warren Phillips installed the posts and signs for 19 locations throughout the park for our cell phone tour, among many, many



other handyman projects. And we put up new fencing in various locations to hide the messy work that goes into making the arboretum so pretty.



A few of our initiatives deserve special mention. This summer, we applied for Level II Accreditation by The ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Program, which required a minimum number of species of trees and woody plants in the arboretum, a defined plant collections policy, and related educational programs. Laurelwood is now recognized as an accredited arboretum in the

Morton Register of Arboreta, a database of the world's gardens dedicated to woody plants. This would not have been possible without the hard work of the Plant Collection Management Committee, in particular Betty Montagne and Joe Di Giacomo, and the preparation and submission of the application by Elaine Fogarty.

And last but certainly not least, I'd like to mention a project that has been on the drawing board for many years, one that we were finally able to complete this year: our new propagation greenhouse. We have named it in honor and



memory of our patron saint, if you will, Dorothy Knippenberg. In addition to donating Laurelwood Arboretum to the town as a public park with her husband John, Dorothy was internationally recognized as a propagator and hybridizer of rare rhododendron and azalea specimens, and it seemed only fitting to name our propagation greenhouse after her. Our Greenhouse Committee has gotten both of our greenhouses fully outfitted and up and running for the winter season. This will allow us to replicate some of the unique plants that Dorothy hybridized so many years ago, to replenish the aging plants in the arboretum, and to get ready for our plant sale every spring. We also plan on holding tours and classes in our greenhouses for the community when it is safe to do so.

Other additions to our new greenhouse include a holding pen, the Lakeland Bank-donated landscaping, and the restoration of the roads around the greenhouse, which involved the spreading of a truckload of gravel and a truckload of stone dust by our can-do volunteers.



There are so many organizations and people who helped us reach the finish line on our propagation greenhouse. Financial support came from three sources: First, the Passaic County Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust. I'd like to make a special mention of Kathleen Caren, who was the Passaic County Open Space Coordinator. Kathleen got us through the complicated process of applying for a grant for our greenhouse, among many other projects at the arboretum, and I don't think we could have done it without her. She passed away last year, and she is missed by all of us. Secondly, the Township of Wayne. We enjoy tremendous support from Mayor Chris Vergano. Special thanks go to



the Director of Parks and Recreation, Tim Roetman, and to Ryan Edge of the Parks and Recreation Department who was tasked with helping us make it through the construction process. We could not have made it across the finish line without Ryan's practical approach and even keel in moving our project forward. Stuart Reiser, our counsel, was instrumental in arranging for Ryan's help, and he also dealt with the many issues we faced with our contractor. And lastly, the members of and donors to Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum, whose dues and donations allowed us to top off the needed funds and who are the source of so much that is special about Laurelwood Arboretum. We are planning a dedication of the Dorothy Knippenberg Propagation Greenhouse, when we hope to be able to thank everyone in person for their contributions and support.

Our Staff and Volunteers

All of the things that I've mentioned so far are in addition to the regular, day-in and day-out hard work of maintaining the arboretum: the weed whacking, the leaf blowing, the irrigating, the brush clearing, the keeping of our paths and roads clear, the filling of holes in our parking lots, the fixing of fences, the keeping of our streams clear of debris, the transport and

spreading of compost and mulch, the planting and dismantling of our Sensory Garden, the putting out and taking in of our Tropical Garden, the planting of literally thousands of bulbs, and the netting, the renetting and the renetting AGAIN to protect our plants from the deer. Speaking of deer, I have to say that that is one problem that we have not yet solved. The time, money and effort that we devote to protecting our horticultural heritage, including our specimen azaleas, from the ravages of deer is like rolling a boulder uphill. Whatever we do, it is never enough. It remains our number one problem.

But returning to our staff, who do all the deer netting, weed whacking, leaf blowing, brush clearing and so on. Our outdoor employees, who were allowed by the state to work, started on March 30 and worked right through to the

asked of them, in addition to their regular duties. We were fortunate to have two assistant gardeners join us later in the season. Kay Gardiner, who was an intern with us for two summers, joined us as an employee, and Jared Egan worked



with us two days a week. Rounding out our staff are Pam Himeles, who wears so many hats but in this case I'm recognizing her contributions as our Office Manager, and Patricia Engrissei, our welcoming weekend greeter.

last day of our season, November 6. Their loyalty and hard work through this difficult summer were extraordinary, and I would like to recognize them. First, our Horticultural Manager, Joan Scott-Miller, who worked tirelessly on behalf of Laurelwood, whether in the arboretum, at home designing garden enhancements and comparison shopping for plants, or at Home Depot. Our gardeners, Eddy Lantigua and Felix Fernandez, never hesitated to help us with whatever we



We also welcomed back many of our outdoor volunteers over the course of the summer, all masked and socially distanced. As the lifeblood of our organization, our volunteers are essential to us. In 2019, our volunteers logged a record 14,000 hours on Laurelwood projects, which represents over \$400,000 in value based on the standard hourly rate assigned to volunteer labor in New Jersey. As Laurelwood Arboretum is a Wayne Township public park, that amount reflects the benefits that the Township and the



community received from the efforts of our volunteers. In this challenging year, our volunteers came through for us again. I'd like to mention one volunteer, Shemar Yap. Shemar, who grew up in Jamaica, is a graduate of Stevens Institute of Technology with a degree in Environmental Engineering, and knew

about Laurelwood because he had recently gotten married here (another wedding!). He had a period of time between finishing his studies and starting his first job, so he became a 20-hour a week volunteer. In addition to doing a lot of heavy lifting for us, Shemar is preparing important reports for us on soil erosion, infrastructure and water resources in the arboretum. We look forward to welcoming back more of our volunteers when the pandemic abates. Please know that we miss you.

Looking Ahead to the 2021 Season

So that is where we are. Where are we going?

The Town is in the midst of a project to dredge out the silt in both of our ponds. As I'm sure everyone who has visited the arboretum has noticed, the ponds were filling in and the surface of the water was covered with harmful algae. It was very unhealthy for our aquatic wildlife and



interfered with our use of the ponds for irrigation in the arboretum. When the Town is done, we will again have a healthy water source at Laurelwood.



This is another example of the support that we have received from the Town over the years, for which we are very grateful.

In the spring, when our volunteers return (masked and socially distanced, if necessary), the banks around Laurel Pond will be replanted with the beautiful azaleas that were transplanted last year in anticipation of the dredging project. Azalea Way will look like Azalea Way once more!

Our irrigation was affected not only by the condition of our ponds. The irrigation system itself is 70 years old and in dire need of repair and expansion. Joe Di Giacomo prepared and submitted an application for a substantial grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust to upgrade our irrigation system and extend it to our

new gardens. We learned in November that we received this grant, and we are planning to make the upgrade in the spring, which will save untold hours now spent in hauling hoses and buckets and hand watering where it is needed.

And our Sculpture Trail has been taking shape over the last year. Stuart and Leslie Reiser brought the idea to us, and as chairpersons they have been generating a lot of enthusiasm for this project. We now have seven exciting sculptures installed



in the arboretum out of an expected fifteen, all by prominent artists. The first weekend in June has been set aside for an opening reception and related activities. And we are hard at work on educational offerings connected to the Sculpture Trail. The Sculpture Trail is being curated by Scott Broadfoot of the Broadfoot & Broadfoot Gallery in Boonton. Scott is doing a great job of selecting the works of art and placing them to their best advantage in the arboretum. This is destined to be a successful fundraiser for the arboretum and a wonderful exhibition for the community.

So that's where we are going. If you haven't already, we would love to have you join us as a member, a donor or a volunteer as we get back to normal in 2021. You will find new friends while helping to preserve the jewel that is Laurelwood Arboretum.

Thank you, and see you in the arboretum!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda E. Ransom".

Linda E. Ransom
President

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