

MAY 1997 UPDATE

The SFA Arboretum in Nacogdoches, Texas, will celebrate a "Garden Gala Day," May 17, 1997 from 9 AM until dusk. The event includes guided tours of the Arboretum, a plant sale featuring a wide range of uncommon, container-grown herbaceous and woody plants, a silent auction of rare plants, some special entertainment (Wynn Logan and the Golden Dreamers . . . and Lydia Harber, dance), refreshments and lectures in the garden. Garden talks will take place at 10 AM, 1 PM, and 3 PM. At 10 AM, Bill Welch, author, lecturer and nationally known TAMU plantsman, will lead a gardening audience through the wonderful world of designing with perennials. Bill is a frequent speaker on heirloom plants and gardens of the South. At 1 PM, Greg Grant, a TAMU horticulturist in East Texas, will present a lecture on old plants for new landscapes. Greg is an adventurous horticulturist, garden historian, and speaker as well as an acclaimed horticulture writer and photographer whose work has appeared in numerous magazines and books. At 3 PM, Dave Creech will lead a tour that focuses on trees, shrubs and vines for East Texas. The Gala is organized by the Arboretum Volunteer Corps Organization and SFA Horticulture Club. The Arboretum is an on-campus garden resource that lies on the western banks of LaNana creek, the stream that bisects the city of Nacogdoches and the campus. The Arboretum's mission is to promote the conservation, selection and use of native plants, and encourage diversity in the landscape philosophy of Texas. Twenty theme gardens display a wide variety of trees, shrubs, vines, herbaceous perennials, ground covers, cacti and ornamental grasses. The Arboretum is located on the SFA campus, on Wilson Drive between College and Starr Avenue. For more information: Call 409-468-3705 at SFA or the Nacogdoches Chamber of Commerce at 409-564-7351.

Arboretum Garden Gala Day is right around the corner (Saturday, May 17, 1997) and it'll probably be our best ever - but only if we can ever get this place organized, plants labeled and volunteers kept happy and healthy. If you haven't walked the gardens lately, you should. There's been enough changes going on around here to make your head spin. This year's Gala coincides with the SFA spring commencement which could be a plus or a minus, depending on how you look at it. In terms of speakers, we've got a dynamic duo leading the attack: Bill Welch and Greg Grant (both nationally known). This could be dangerous for horticulture.

HORTICULTURE LOSES THREE OF THE GOOD ONES: Tragically, this update coincides with three bombshells lobbed into the plant world this spring. First it was J.C. Raulston (North Carolina State University Arboretum Director), then Benny Simpson (Texas A & M University native plant scientist), and, finally, our very own Bob Rogers (SFA Grounds Director) that made the trek into garden heaven - all three in the span of about two months. These folks influenced the SFA Arboretum in so many ways. They helped shape the focus and mission of the Arboretum and, most important, they provided a gardening beacon for all of us to follow.

THE MAST ENDOWMENT: The A.T. and Pat Mast, Jr. \$375,000 endowment to the Arboretum was announced in August, 1996, and was part of a million plus dollar gift to the university. Similar amounts were bestowed on the Nursing program, the Alumni

Foundation and the Art Department. All of us working near the nerve center of the Arboretum remain in shock. This is the largest single gift that SFA has ever received and those of us at the Arboretum feel it gives us a shot at going regional or national in recognition. We've always preached that the Arboretum with a little nudge and a little expansion could be a special resource capable of drawing in folks from across the south. The details of this gift were illuminated by Dr. Jerry Holbert, Office of University Advancement, at the annual SFA Board of Advisors meeting October 4, 1996. The whole thing remains overwhelming. Why the SFA Arboretum? The Masts recognize that the oldest town in Texas could do more to make this city a really special place to live in and to visit. The Arboretum can contribute to that effort.

FIRST HORTICULTURE/ARBORETUM TECHNICIAN: JoAnn Carter came on board as the Arboretum's first-ever Technician on September 6, 1996 and the Arboretum will never be the same. I find myself just getting out of the way wondering if there's a leash in the headhouse. Check out the new office and toolroom in the Headhouse! We have a phone (409-468-4404). There are new benches in the polyhouse and glasshouse. New garden beds have been carved out all over the place. Our morale remains high and Horticulture students know something is going on but they're not sure what. Funds to support this one-year position came through the Hody Wilson Endowment. This is a unique use of this fund and we are struggling to find a way to make this position permanent; we have until September to figure that one out. I have already announced to the world that I cannot go back to pre-Technician days! For now, all we can say is "Hooray!"

CAMPUS AS ARBORETUM?: The answer is maybe. A proposal to designate the "campus as an Arboretum" has been presented to the President and will be placed on the Board of Regent's agenda during their summer session. Essentially, this step would allow the Arboretum to increase the biodiversity of the campus forest and shrubbery by adding promising, adapted, and colorful landscape plants. By working closely with the Grounds Director, there's a unique opportunity to add to the beauty of the campus and set in motion a long-term evaluation program. By going with a "collections" approach, we can put together communities of species and cultivars that include many connoisseur plants rarely seen by the public. There are plenty of spots at SFA that need immediate landscape help - and the Arboretum can help make the change with variety in mind.

IS THERE A WORLD-CLASS AZALEA GARDEN COMING TO NACOGDOCHES?

Again, the answer is maybe. We do have some outside-the-university support to make it happen but there's a lot to iron out - like can we keep it maintained. Progress has been made. Plans, maps and budgets were laid out "on the third floor" and discussions are underway about converting the woodland that lies between Grounds and the W.R. Johnson coliseum into a world-class 8-acre "Azalea Garden." The site is absolutely perfect. The patriarch pines and hardwoods that line the front four acres provides the ideal home for azaleas and many "companion" plants, including Japanese maples, silverbells, snowbells, sweetshrub, wintersweet, witchhazels and many, many others. Of course, I'm thinking that after the backbone of this color garden is built, we could start

looking at the wonderful herbaceous end of plants for the shady garden - the perfect evaluation garden for the Arboretum and a wonderful spot to visit. Stay tuned.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION PAVILION PROJECT UNDERWAY: The Arboretum and Art Department at SFA are cooperatively promoting a Timber Framers Guild of America project. The construction of a 24' X 24' "outdoor educational pavilion" will take place in March, 1998. The Guild chose the SFA Arboretum location after looking over six other candidates and we are jumping with joy. These are the same folks that built the gazebo at the Hoya Sterne garden on Main street. This will be a structure for outdoor classes, reunions, meetings, and parties - it will be partially open on the sides with an architecturally interesting roof design. The Timber Framers are an education-based group and 20 to 30 paying students from around the U.S. will come to Nacogdoches for one to two weeks; they pay a fee and produce a product that is artistically exciting, environmentally prudent, education-based, and intended for public use and visibility. Eloise Adams and John Daniels in Art helped pick the location at the North end of Arboretum. The Arboretum has received Physical Plant approval and a thumbs up from the President. We provide the materials, get the construction site ready and pay instructor fees. Project destined to generate a lot of publicity. Project is planned for March, 1998. This is basically a \$20,000 outlay. About 30 to 50% of real cost if we were to build it without the guild's guidance and help.

THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN: A "Children's Garden" project is not forgotten - just slightly delayed. Cheryl Tate and Rachel Emrick - both having suffered losses in family members - are now back in the proposal submission stage with a number of promising funding agencies. This unique project includes an environmental educational component for K - 8 schools in the region. The site chosen is at the North end of the vegetable plots on the slopes north and north west toward College Avenue. Absolutely perfect - particularly with the Timber Framers Guild structure as the main eye-catcher. The garden design includes a heavy component of color via a butterfly and hummingbird garden, a water garden, and a raised bed children's vegetable garden where the current vegetable garden and lines of vines call home. The design looks terrific. Cheryl and Rachel are charging ahead, working all kinds of hours to make something special happen in this bare, sunny spot in the Arboretum.

AVCO MAKING A DIFFERENCE: The SFA Arboretum Volunteer Corps Organization is making a difference. Curators in the garden are helping us shift attention to new developments. Ruth Williamson is remarkable; her every-Tuesday attack on the perennial border is a joy to behold. Place is shining. Roger Hughes is now curator of the fern collection scattered here and there in the shade garden (note the changes there!). Because of Roger's effort we are now an official satellite garden of the Hardy Fern Foundation, a great step forward. The first planting went in on March 15th and timely rains have settled them into their new home. We have a good start on a Hosta collection (thank you, Tawakoni Plant Farms and TreeSearch Farms) - the Arboretum will soon be home to more of these wonderful woodland and shade plants. Barbara Stump, our latest Arboretum volunteer (Mercer Arboretum volunteer of the year award!), and my newest

graduate student is working with Greg Grant in the Texas Heritage Garden and changes are brewing there. Barb is bound to make something happen around here.

CURATING OPPORTUNITIES STILL ABOUND!: There's no need to worry. With twenty-two theme gardens in place or in the planning stages - we still have plenty of opportunities for curators. I promise the cactus garden will be kept off the list!. If you want to be an Arboretum curator - contact JoAnn Carter at the greenhouse phone (we now have an answering machine!).

NEW GARDENS - The past year has seen some great expansion in plantings. We've added a new section on to the end of Asian Valley. Two successful colonies of endangered plants are established in the endangered plants garden. The dry garden got a few thousand square feet addition with lots of new plants. The perennial border expanded to include just about all of the facing of the Ag/Art parking lot. The herb garden enjoyed a development on the east side. We have a new ginger/crinum collection just to the east of the Elking Environment. We have a new Magnolia planting on the south side of the Power station. We have a new shrub border that runs on the east side of the Physical plant complex - drip irrigated. We have more lines in our lines of vines. Finally, the shade garden jumped the stream and invaded north in fine style; note the east Texas red rocks that define the raised curvilinear beds of that area destined for Hostas and ferns. We have a new catwalk just about finished in the bog garden.

SUCCESSFUL 1996 GARDEN GALA DAY AND FABULOUS FALL FESTIVAL: The May 18, 1996 Arboretum Garden Gala Day and October 5, 1996 Fabulous Fall Festivals were the two main events of the past year and neither of the two events would have been possible without the help of the volunteers and the students. This garden is more than plants, it's people. We estimated the attendance at the spring gala at about 1500. The October event brought in about half that many. The big red and white tent was a big hit (Thank you, James Harkness and John Rulfs of the Physical Plant!).

GREG GRANT COURSE TAUGHT IN THE FALL, 1996: More good news! Greg Grant taught a night course in the Fall, 1996 - Agriculture 280 - "Annuals and Perennials: Color in the East Texas landscape." The class ended up with over 40 students, about half of them coming from outside the normal university student population. Greg comes with high credentials. He's author with Bill Welch of Southern Heirloom Gardens and has written many articles for gardening magazines on a wide range of landscaping subjects. He maintains a busy lecture series across the south. His goals are to learn as much as he can and share it. He is also curator of the Texas Heritage Garden in the Arboretum and a die-hard variegated plant enthusiast (one of the few plantsmen impressed enough to raise an eyebrow when I held up a variegated poison ivy found on the east coast - limited commercial potential. Greg's talents amaze all of us who know him.

FIVE GREAT GRADUATE STUDENTS ON BOARD: For this spring, we have three terrific Graduate Research Assistants and two unfunded graduate students on board. Chris Jones comes to us from the Biology Department and is taking on a thesis on the propagation, multiplication and reintroduction of *Phlox nivalis* spp. *texensis*, Texas

trailing phlox, now down to three colonies in the world (southeast Texas). This position and the research is funded by a grant from the University Research Council. Stacy Scott will graduate with the MS in May, 1997; she comes to us from California where she is an endangered plant biologist for the U.S. Forest Service. Her thesis involves a plant establishment study with *Hibiscus dasycalyx*, the Neches river rose mallow, another one of the most endangered plants in east Texas. Stacy has been a breath of fresh air in the building - a hard worker, extremely well organized and blessed with just the right sense of humor. Dawn Parish is a new graduate student in our program. She comes to us from West Texas A&M and we are just now deciding on the thrust of her thesis. For right now, it looks as if Dawn's interest is moving to the endangered plants conservation arena. The Arboretum, Horticulture facility and Mill Creek Gardens combination is hard to beat when it comes to good field research in endangered plant ecology. Shawn Geiman will be graduating in May, 1997. Shawn has left his fingerprints all over the Arboretum. The endangered plants pergola, much of the signage, and a big hunk of irrigation work fell on this young man's shoulders. Shawn, we will miss you. Barbara Stump, the most recent addition to the graduate student army in Horticulture, is a real surprise! Barb is from Houston, experienced in the plant world, and this past year's Mercer Arboretum volunteer of the year award! She wants a thesis and we are looking at the Azalea garden collection and mapping effort as a landscape design thesis for the MS.

MILL CREEK GARDENS: Mill Creek Gardens is an endowed 119-acre natural area six miles west of town. This forested property is blessed with dry, upland sands, mesic mid-slopes and wet creek bottoms, springs, streams and an eight-acre lake at its center. This gift from Elisabeth Hayter Montgomery is now a busy beehive of interesting conservation projects - many just now getting underway. This plant sanctuary is currently supporting the work of three MS thesis students: Stacy Scott, Dawn Parish, and Chris Jones . . . all three are working on in situ and ex situ studies that focus on horticultural treatments that favor the successful introduction of endangered species into appropriate natural habitats. This natural area is serving as a perfect example of just what a private landowner and university resources can do in the conservation arena if the right strategy is taken. The long-term goal of these projects is to learn more about the ecology of endangered species and their horticultural characteristics - propagation, growth, flowering - to ultimately serve as a germplasm repository for conservation agencies attempting reintroduction projects in East Texas (U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the Nature Conservancy, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Natural Heritage Program).

SFA HORTICULTURE CLUB SHINES AT BIRMINGHAM: The SFA Horticulture Club judging team of Matt Welch, Rachel Emrick, Jeff Simpson and Heather Thormahlen came home winners from the annual conference of the Southern Region of the American Society for Horticultural Science held at Birmingham, Alabama, January 30 - February 2, 1997. The SFA team placed third overall out of 11 teams competing (Mississippi State 1st and TAMU 2nd). 2nd place in woody ornamentals, 2nd place in Greenhouse floral and foliage plants, and 3rd place in fruit and nut judging. Outstanding show for a small team and we walked away proud.

Actually, this present group of Horticulture students is one of the best ever and I think it's because the program is better - and that's primarily because of the garden. The whole place is really the best teacher a student could have. All I have to do is nudge students around just a bit. Very little in the plant world that a student can't "get into" in this plant wonderland. We're seeing better student volunteerism and a more active Horticulture Club. John Macha is this spring's President and he led like a champion. I would list all the students but that would leave some out so let's just say the whole bunch needs a round of applause. Plenty of special plants moving through our hands to the public - I think there's the beginning of a real student appreciation of this place as a horticultural paradise . . . and there's a good education and fun times for all that want it.

DR. T.A. ALHASHIMI RETIRES: A retirement reception for Dr. T.A. Alhashimi was held at the Texas Association of Nurserymen's convention, Houston, Texas, August 18, 1996. I can't say how terrific it was to see so many old faces and rediscover forgotten memories. Too many memorable stories to recount. Dr. Al was also recognized at the annual Agriculture Department's spring banquet, April 22, 1997. This is Dr. Alhashimi's final semester at SFA - this is a man who has given his best to his students and he will be missed.

GETTING THE WORD OUT: The gardens really are gaining in credibility. Now that we've been around ten years, there's lots to show. Neil Sperry's Gardens magazine ran a fine spread on the Arboretum's Endangered plants three R's conservation program (April 1996) and gave a big boost to the Garden Gala Day in May 1996. As icing on the cake, we received some national attention in August by a feature article in Nursery Manager & Production (NM Pro), a magazine for the nursery industry. That piece by Sami Thomas outlined the Arboretum's "Plants with Promise" strategy. In another good piece of luck, a January, 1997 American Nurserymen issue featured an article "In support of Biodiversity" by yours truly that addressed the contribution of Horticulture to saving endangered species - and featured our work at Mill Creek Gardens as case studies. Finally, we have received word that Texas Highways is doing a feature on the Arboretum (with a sidebar on the LaNana creek trail!) that will appear in the spring of 1998. Diane Morey Sitton has been assigned to do the article. In addition, our very own Jeff Abt has done a remarkable job featuring many of the Arboretum high performance plants - woodies and herbaceous. Thank you, Jeff Abt, for promoting (for example) the Michelias . . . lots of potential there!

BIRDHOUSE STOLEN AND RETURNED: On a more serious note, the great birdhouse theft was hard to take. No doubt that it was a tempting prize; Lydia Harber, AVCO volunteer, had done a remarkable job of painting flowers and birds and butterflies in bold bright colors on the three story martin condominium - a sight to behold. The birdhouse was put up the day before the October Fall Festival and by morning it was gone. The incident was slowly forgotten until after Christmas when one of my students confided

quietly to me that she knew a young lady that knew one of the young men in the house with other young men who were responsible for this dirty deed. Indeed, the birdhouse was proudly on display behind their home. College kids. I relayed back the news that we wanted it back and would take it back without sending anyone to jail. Continued stalling. I relate the news to my student that the Herb Society folks are on a warpath and want to arrive with blue and red lights going. My student passes the word along. The birdhouse arrives back at the head house no worse for the wear (now mounted on a sturdy post and concreted firmly into place).

THE GREAT CONCRETE DOG WAS STOLEN: In mid-February, 1997, a concrete dog sculpture showed up one morning over near the dry garden - basically a beautifully done German Shepherd in a sitting position. From a distance it looked absolutely real; even our normal army of visiting dogs were fooled - bristling, growling and barking until inspecting the threat up close. Well, after a few days of discussion and debate among the Arboretum warriors, it was decided to drag the piece into the dry garden on the knoll overlooking our "Asian Valley." A red bandanna appeared around the dog's throat. The possibility of theft of such a fine piece was discussed and an action plan was put in place. JoAnn secured a mobile home anchor and thick steel cable and the dog was ours. Several weeks go by and the dog seemed quite happy in his new home until I discover on one of my early morning walks that the dog is gone. The cable is nowhere to be seen and a sad mobile home anchor was all that was left on the scene. We can see where the dog was drug to the parking lot. There are footprints. Later that morning, UPD leaves a message for me to get in touch. I learned that our dog was stolen first in January 1995 from the front porch of a Nacogdoches resident, that these folks had seen their dog on an Arboretum walk-through, that the Nacogdoches police were brought in, that UPD was brought in, that proof of ownership was a problem, that the dog was impounded until proof of ownership was established, that the folks that owned the dog got signatures from folks up and down their street swearing that they owned the dog and that the dog was now back home. Dog's name was obviously Lassie.

WHERE'S THE ARBORETUM NEWSLETTER? Ok! Ok! I admit it. It's another record late submission for the Arboretum Newsletter. This "Update" - the second in six months - will have to suffice. Mailouts of the newsletter are turning into a painful annual event rather than the every few months I originally promised. Procrastination, writer's block, a computer problem or two, my elbow hurts and there's just too much on the plate are excuses that first come to mind. Timidly offered as some solace is that this "update" does let the "Friends" know just what is going on in and around the Arboretum.

The next real newsletter will be short on developments and activities and long on plants. I promise. With over 1000 accessions since January 1, 1996, and hundreds of never-seen-the-light-of-day-in-Texas plants now in the ground . . . we've got a lot to report. We've also got the 1996 accession list ready to print, some pertinent articles and tree, shrub, and woody vine features to report and I may even make a brief comment or two about herbaceous perennials.

