

Volume 3, Issue 3: "So much happening it takes four pages"

It's Our 20th Anniversary!

The horticulture garden has gone from bedding plant trials to campus landmark over the past 20 years. Though the garden concept was born in 1983, things really got going over the 1984-85 school year.

What a busy twenty years it's been for all of those involved with the garden! Literally hundreds of Hort students have endured countless plant i.d. quizzes in the garden. The bonds of holy matrimony for so many couples have been forged beneath the Trident Maples (wouldn't it be interesting to know how they all turned out...).

Over the next three *Garden Quarterly* issues, we'll be reflecting on the progress of the garden over the past two decades. This issue features Dr. Robert Lyons' recollections of how the garden started. Next, Mr. Robert McDuffie will share some of his experiences in guiding Landscape Construction students in the creation of many of our garden features...bet there'll be some good stories! — H.S.

20th Anniversary



2004-2005

Hahn Gift Grows Garden!

Holly Scoggins, Director

Dr. T. Marshall Hahn and his wife Peggy have made an estate gift of \$1 million and additional cash over time totaling \$475,000 to the Horticulture Garden. The Hahns are long-time supporters of Virginia Tech and have made annual contributions to the garden. University president from 1962-1974, Marshall wanted to honor Peggy for her enduring support of Virginia Tech and his presidency, as well as her great love of gardening. The magnitude of the gift is sufficient to add Peggy's name to that of the garden's, and our signs and logo will be changing to reflect that. Our head horticulturist, Stephanie Huckestein, knows first-hand of Mrs. Hahn's gardening interest as she worked with her for several years. Funds from this gift will be used for design and construction of a 2000 sq. ft. special events, education, and visitor facility, slated for completion by late Fall of 2005. The *Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion* will be built on the open land earmarked for the Phase II garden expansion. The pavilion will greatly



Marshall and Peggy Hahn at their farm in Ellett Valley.

(Photo: Gene Dalton - Roanoke Times)

enhance the garden's capacity for special events; in turn, generating operating income.

Betsy Flanagan, Vice President for Development and University Relations, handled the agreement negotiations and preparation. The VT Commemorative Tributes Committee and the Board of Visitors approved the naming in late August. Stay tuned as the impact of this gift transforms the garden over the next year. Needless to say, Stephanie and I have yet to stop grinning.

The Early Days of the Virginia Tech Horticulture Garden

Robert Lyons

Director and Distinguished Professor, JC Raulston Arboretum, NC State University, and past Director of the Horticulture Garden

The genesis meeting for what became the Virginia Tech Horticulture Garden is hard to forget; I'm not sure why, but I remember it as if it were yesterday.

The department was located in Smyth Hall and Dept. Head Dr. Tom Fretz called together myself and fellow faculty members Mr. Robert McDuffie and Dr. Richard Johnson for a meeting. We hashed out a loose (very!) strategy to

The Early Days of the Virginia Tech Horticulture Garden (continued from page 1)

transform the area adjacent to the greenhouses from linear trial beds into both a teaching laboratory and campus landmark. As is often the case in our business, the idea was fueled with no money, pure naiveté, and the momentum of perseverance and creativity to propel its implementation.

We assembled a talented group of advanced undergraduates within the curriculum boundaries of a Special Projects course and charged them with developing a Master Plan for the site. The area measured a bit more than an acre, quite manageable we thought, in making the assignment. It turned out that we were not too far off base. The students were exemplary, hard working (and very forgiving, I might add) of their very green professors who had fewer than 10 years experience in their jobs at that time collectively!

We took field trips to expose the student team to similar gardens and arboreta, ironically paying a visit to the one I currently direct at NC State University. They picked up ideas and tips and transferred them to paper, iteration after iteration, until a design arose. That design was actually represented by several pieces, each constructed by a small team within the larger group. A few brave students managed a section individually but the entire effort was definitely group-based.

The initial crits, or sessions to critique the students work, were great fun but also tested nerves. The students had become close after many late nights at the drawing tables and freely exchanged criticism regarding each others ideas, as did their guiding professors! I may not remember all

of the students names (sorry folks!), but I do recall the essence of the final, agreed upon, master plan. It reflected the needs of our courses at the time, the trends of the day, and some classic design principles. Herbaceous perennials were well represented, as they remain today, and combined familiar perennial border concepts.

Incidentally, the first plants in these beds came from a generous donation from Andre Viette, who must have thought we were crazy when we rolled into his nursery in Fishersville and made our large request! He was the perfect gentleman and added much more to our initial list of requests.

Annuals dominated the view from Washington Street and became less important from a trialing perspective. Instead, they were assigned that location for the magnetic effect of their color. The entire border adjoining the Food Science buildings property was designed with primarily woody species in mind, although herbaceous plants were also included for particular interest.

“Developing this site also served as a training ground for piloting a Bobcat, an experience that yielded at least two rollovers by this author and another faculty member whose name shall remain unspoken ...”



The original trial beds, 1982 B.G. (Before Gardens) (photo by Robert Lyons)

Some woodies that comprised the original design palette and remain today include a columnar ginkgo, red buckeye, and *Photinia villosa*. A water garden was added to this area several years after the gardens inception so as to involve the generosity of Springdale Water Gardens in the entire project.

A truly remarkable part of the Garden, at least in this author's mind, is the alee (row) of trident maples that form a curved spine leading to what is now the Jane Andrews Memorial Stream Garden. These trees were originally installed as small whips that may have measured 2.5 feet tall, tops. In fact, I still have a slide showing one of our students watering the newly installed plants with a hose whose stream appears to be engulfing the straggling whip.

Throughout the years, we were determined to make this planting work. Their survival through at least two infamous, tree topping, Blacksburg ice storms and the subsequent restorative pruning is a testament to the resolve of the faculty and students to keep these trees growing. It is gratifying to see that 20 years of perseverance has



The genesis of the xerophytic garden.
(photo by Robert Lyons)

indeed produced the lovely alec envisioned by the original student team!

An area of xerophytic plants was also one of the originally specified and installed sections of the Garden. Tucked back in the corner near the green shed, it

contains a dry wall, complete with species that were installed in the earliest of years. The backfill up against the wall was meticulously amended to improve the drainage of an otherwise slow-draining clay soil. Developing this site also served as a training ground for piloting a Bobcat, an experience that

yielded at least two rollovers by this author and another faculty member whose name shall remain unspoken in this article!

Finally, there were two pivotal moments in the history of the VTHG: the establishment of a team of volunteers who religiously

reported for duty every Monday night throughout the summer and the institution of the M. Evans Gardener summer internship for our students. Without these, I have serious doubts that the significant progress that was achieved throughout the 1980s would have occurred at all. In a nutshell, the decade of the 80s saw the inception and key growth of the VTHG; ultimately leading to the recognized value and beauty inherent in that special spot on the VT campus!

[Note: Dr. Lyons recently accepted the Directorship of the prestigious Longwood Graduate Program in Public Horticulture, administered by the University of Delaware. He will start his new job at the first of the year. Congratulations, Bob! - HS]

Matt Hudgins—Pondmeister!

Stephanie Huckestein, Head Horticulturist

Everyone at the garden would like to send out a big “thank you” to Matt Hudgins for his continued volunteer help in the garden. Matt started volunteering at the garden three years ago when he was a student at Blacksburg High School. He was in a special education program that arranges training for job experience after high school graduation. He enjoyed his horticulture class in high school so his teacher thought the garden would be a good place to gain more experience working with plants.

He has learned a lot and has proven to be a big help at the garden. He helps with mulching, watering, weeding, and many other tasks in the garden. You can

usually find him working around his favorite spot—the Jane Andrews Memorial Stream Garden.

Now that he has graduated from high school, he is part of a new program called the On-Campus Transition Program. The program,



Matt radios in for his next assignment at the garden.
(photo by Stephanie Huckestein)

which serves the older student, promotes career and skill development opportunities for high school students with disabilities who may qualify to enroll in post-secondary educational institutions. Matt has chosen to continue volunteering at the Horticulture Garden and also works at West End Market. He is taking a college-level Introduction to Horticulture class.

I have worked with Matt for the past three years and have seen tremendous improvement in all areas. Reliable and hard-working, he has matured immensely and takes great pride in the work he does here at the garden. He jokes that someday he will take over my job!



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Join or renew as a Friend of the Garden today! Consider the benefits: Discounts at educational programs and plant sales; free admission to over 100 botanic gardens around the country, compliments of our reciprocal membership with the American Horticulture Society; and the good feeling that comes from helping support the Hort Garden! Check it out at www.hort.vt.edu/vthg or call (540) 231-5970

Winter Seminar Series Shaping Up

It's a humdinger! We've ranged far and wide (well, *far*, anyway) to bring you educational and entertaining speakers and topics to liven up the winter. A few highlights include **Brent Heath** of Brent and Becky's Bulbs, third generation bulb expert and author of *Daffodils for North American Gardens*. **David Pippin**, horticulturist and floral designer *extraordinaire* from Richmond, will present a special hands-on workshop. Circle January 22 on your calendar (drum roll please)... in conjunction with the Southwest Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association, we're featuring Dr. Perennials himself, **Allan Armitage** of the University of Georgia! We'll have a special afternoon program to be followed by a book sale and signing. Look for more details plus a registration form in the early January edition of the Garden Quarterly.— *H.S.*

In the next issue of the Garden Quarterly:

- Progress report on the Peggy Lee Hahn Pavilion
- More reflections on the garden's 20th anniversary
- Registration information for the Winter Seminar Series
- Return of the "Pin-up Plant of the Season" (there wasn't room in this issue!)