

Acorns

Welcome to the inaugural edition of “Under the Oaks”, the flagship publication of the newly certified Memphis Botanic Garden Arboretum. (Actually it is presently the “only-ship” publication of the arboretum, but let’s not nitpick on this joyous occasion.) A word of advise, – and you will be getting many of those in the coming issues of “Under the Oaks” – save this issue because some day this will become a collector’s item among the memorabilia of MBG. Why do I say that, because from small beginnings great accomplishments can arise, and we, at MBG, have great expectations.

What we want to do and where we want to go will unfold in the issues of this newsletter like the plot in the chapters of your favorite book. So stay tuned to learn more about trees, “urban forestry”, “green development”, the socioeconomic benefits of plants for urban metropolitan areas and more. But enough about where we are going; today’s “Acorns” is about this Newsletter, the role of the arboretum and who made it all possible.

The name of our newsletter came from the musings of our noted horticulturist Rick Pudwell while he “relaxed” tending his private zoo after work one day. If you are familiar with the MBG grounds, you know that we have a few oaks, even after the July 2003 storm that destroyed more than thirty-five of them, so “Under the Oaks” seemed like a very fitting name for a newsletter, particularly an arboretum newsletter. Each issue will be composed of regularly themed topics like “Acorns” (miscellaneous musings of a former assistant professor – me), “What About This Tree?” (information about specific trees), “The Root of the Matter” (articles about cultural issues), “Buds” (articles for kids) and “Questions Anyone?” (where your questions are answered). These regular articles will be accompanied by writings on many other topics relating to trees and the environment so there is bound to be something in each newsletter specifically for you.

I was going to write about the Arboretum *per se*, but I’m running out of space and I don’t want to short shift the people who made the Arboretum possible, so refer to the “Questions Anyone?” portion of this newsletter to find out “Why an Arboretum?”.

Now for those special people who made the Arboretum certification possible. MBG had an Arboretum. In fact it was one of the first named areas that comprised MBG over fifty years ago. But it was relegated to a few acres on the southwest corner of the property. It had less than 25 tree species, was no longer labeled properly, and had incomplete documentation.

With the encouragement and support of the then new(Fall 2004) Executive Director, Jim Duncan, the staff in Horticulture, Education and Development agreed to commit the necessary resources to get a level four arboretum certified here at MBG. This was not an easy task. Certification is granted through the Tennessee Urban Forestry Council, which strictly monitors compliance with very specific requirements including having at least 120 tree species properly labeled, a site map with tree list and a newsletter.

Leadership for this undertaking was assumed by Laurie Williams, our Botanist and Greenhouse Manager at the time (she is now heavily involved in educational activities along with the arboretum). Laurie gathered a team of dedicated volunteers who hammered out – sometimes literally so – the compliance obligations. Once or twice a week, starting in January 2005 this team met to cuss and discuss what had to be done and then carryout the tasks. They found over 135 different species of trees scattered across our 96 acres. They plotted locations. They created maps. They found and documented accession data for each tree. And they labeled, sometime multiple times, all the trees included in the arboretum and many others not officially included.

Instrumental in this search and discovery task was Jim Volgus, retired IBM, whose plant knowledge and dogged determination were invaluable. Professor emeritus of Biology (?) Dr. Bob Jones (Rhoades College) was a linchpin in creating the database and map generation. Nancy Bauman, Dana Daniels and Poly Baxter contributed their talents week after week to insure that everything was in order before the certification team arrived. And, of course, those two founts of plant knowledge (and identification) Rick Pudwell and Kyle McLane provided invaluable support for the arboretum team. Our heart-felt thanks is extended to all those who helped make this certification possible. This is a splendid example of what can be accomplished when people, regardless of background, station or position, work together to achieve a common goal.

See you next issue,
Stan Myers