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PNPC NEWS

~Promoting Education about Conservation and Use of Native Plants of the Southern Forest~

Editor—Barbara Stump

Volume 4, No. 1—September 2005

Native Azaleas Featured at Arboretum Plant Sale

Mark your calendars for Saturday, October 1, 2005 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for the SFA Mast Arboretum's Fabulous Fall Festival Plant Sale. Thanks to the fine donation by Plant Development Services, Inc. of Loxley, Alabama, and liners from van der Giessen Nursery in Semmes, Alabama, we will have gorgeous, big native azaleas for sale. Lance Craig and his crew have taken very good care of these gems. You can even buy in quantity, and in 1- and 2-gallon sizes that will burst into orange (like 'Topsy Tangerine', shown right), yellow, or pink *fragrant* flowers next April and May. Some of the proceeds of this sale will help fund our Arboretum and PNPC Environmental Education program (see insert). The sale will be held on the SFA Intramural Field on Wilson Drive in Nacogdoches.



Principal, Liberty Hall, LaNana Creek Trail, Oak Grove Cemetery, SFA Mast Arboretum, Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, and, finally, the PNPC at the Tucker House.”

Happy Trails are Here Again!

Dave Creech, August 30, 2005

Barbara Stump asked that I reflect a bit on the past five years—a kind of where we've been, where we're at, and where we're going perspective. There's a lot to be excited about. In many ways, the PNPC is evolving into something we all can be really proud of. While we didn't know it at the time, Lady Bird Johnson's waving of the wand on April 8, 2000, was more of a magic defining moment than we ever knew at the time. To jog my memory, I dug into my archives and found the following recounting in one of my old annual reports:

“April 7, 2000 – Incredible. Lady Bird Johnson airport arrival event, two-hour, once-in-a-lifetime limo drive—two secret service people up front—countryside trip in conversation with Lady Bird Johnson. Car with two more secret service people followed—and UPD there to back up the caravan. Visited Mill Creek Gardens, Plaza

“April 8, 2000 – Grand opening of the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center and the Dedication of the Lady Bird Johnson Demonstration Garden. City, SFA administration, Board of Regents, children singing, and a big crowd with lots of smiles. Lady Bird Johnson in fine form, Arthur Temple at top cheer, fund-raising banquet luncheon, lots of press and good publicity.”

One special memory was visiting with Lady Bird about her childhood near Karnak and being impressed with her knowledge of native plants. At one point on a sandy trail at Mill Creek Gardens, I noted that the Grancy Gray Beard was in full show. Lady Bird's eyesight was not what it used to be and she asked if we could stop and if I would gather some branches. Our driver, Secret Service Mike, came to a stop and announced on his mike to the rest of our caravan “Dr. Creech is about to disembark and will be gathering some branches.” Under the watchful eye of our protectors, I felt more than a little silly, but very, very lucky to be there....

From the very beginning, Dr. James Kroll and I believed that the Tucker property was a greenbelt resource just waiting to happen—that we had a chance to create a garden “jewel” on the LaNana Creek necklace. To give credit where credit is due, it was James who first suggested the idea that the Tucker property was an ideal native plant arboretum, and he took the first step to make something happen. To both of us, problems like no budget, no staff, and no plan seemed surmountable at the time—for reasons I can’t remember now. Anyway, I was sold and after a year, the administration gave the idea of a Native Plant Center a “thumbs up,” and permission to proceed was the rule of the day. Next came a great Board of Advisors, a growing Friends group, a few fortuitous grants, the Lady Bird Johnson dedication event, and the PNPC was born.

Another important first step was hiring Darrel Morrison, a famed landscape architect from the University of Georgia, who created the concept plan—and to this day we remain true to its vision. The first five-year goal was a big one—to build a first-class Horticulture facility with outside-the-university support. We’ve done that. Yes, we still have to hang the sign, clean up the headhouse, and tie up a few loose ends, but it’s all there—a nice cedar privacy fence, a great Jaderloon Quonset greenhouse, a built-to-last shade structure, an outdoor container yard, and the final hurdle—a wonderful metal building that serves as the Headhouse for the whole thing. Perfect.

And, now, we’re ready to set out on a trail network for the PNPC, a huge effort to take the garden up another notch. Coming at just the right time, and making it all possible is a grant from The Meadows Foundation, a Texas Parks and Wildlife grant, a George and Fay Young Foundation grant, the support of the SFA Administration and the gracious nature of all our friends. When 2006 comes to an end the PNPC will have a network of trails, bridges, benches and kiosks that will make this garden an even more special spot in our community.

Plant Portraits—Dr. Dave Creech

Indian Pink—*Spigelia marilandica*—is one of about 50 species of mainly herbaceous perennials of the family *Loganiaceae* from mostly tropical and warm areas. Our native Indian Pink is just about the hardiest of the lot and right at the top of what a Pineywoods



native can offer. I love this plant – always have. My first memory of a colony goes back over 20 years to a lazy afternoon excursion with Lynn Lowrey near Kirbyville, Texas, on one of those better blacktopped FM roads through the pine forests in Newton County. I remember climbing a small hill and over the top and then down to a sun-lit swag with a small stream at its center. It was in a humic well-drained moist spot that Indian Pink had found a home – a happy colony of a just a few hundred square feet enjoying morning sun and afternoon shade. Flowering at full force, I can remember thinking, “Hey, we need to use this plant more.”

For the gardener in East Texas, the best landscape home for our native Indian Pink is a moist, rich, humic forest with protection from the harsh western sun. Once well-established, Indian Pink is really a rather reliable returning herbaceous perennial. It grows as a rhizomatous clump between one and two feet high, with about a one- to two-foot spread. It has supple, sometimes glossy dark green foliage that persists throughout the growing season. From late spring into summer, it bears many upright, tubular, bright red flowers with light yellow throats. The five-lobed tips of the flowers open gradually and look like small cream-colored stars perched on red tubular pedestals. In bloom, no plant has greater grace and charm. The plant can be made to rebloom if lightly pruned after the first flowering event, since Indian Pink blooms on new wood. Under good culture, leaves are robust, clean, and dark green.

For bird lovers, Indian Pink is a major nectar source for ruby-throated hummingbirds, and it has been voted one of the top ten hummingbird plants in the

country by Operation RubyThroat, an international research and education initiative based in York, South Carolina. For the herbal crowd, the genus *Spigelia* is in “vogue,” with attributes as an anthelmintic (vermifuge). In fact, any search of the Web will find buckets of *Spigelia* products touting anti-headache attributes.

The only headache we’ve had with the species has been with propagation; the plant is a bit tricky. The PNPC has had poor luck with seed, but we’ve attempted few trials. Asexual propagation is the norm in the trade, with a preference for the most vigorous tips as cutting material. These succulent tips can root fast, but it is often difficult to maintain turgor, and mist propagation requires attention to detail. Since they are prone to damping off, propagators use a light mix with mist intervals frequent enough to prevent first wilt. Because of high demand and lack of supply, the plant is now becoming more and more available from the tissue culture world. The end-result is that plants are there for anyone willing to seek them out.

Other related species include *S. texana* (syn. *S. loganoides* or Florida Pinkroot) and *S. gentianoides* (Gentian Pinkroot). Neither is in cultivation right now, but *S. texana*, a white-flowering species, is reported to have potential as a groundcover. *S. hedyotideae*, Prairie Pinkroot, is native to the southern and western parts of north central Texas and is normally found on limestone outcrops and gravelly soils; this species is even more uncommon than Indian Pink. Further to the east in Florida and Alabama, the pale-pink-flowering *S. gentianoides* is so rare it’s on the federal list of endangered species. Evidently pressure from agriculture and forestry has been a main threat, and the plant is limited to a small number of populations in Florida and Alabama. Conservation efforts are under way at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, in Athens, Georgia. *S. splendens* is reported in Mexico and Guatemala. In terms of landscape and medicinal interest, *Spigelia* is a genus worth exploring. The PNPC is initiating a project to build a collection of *Spigelia* genotypes from the Pineywoods and states further east, and we will be promoting the use of this plant in East Texas landscapes.

Fabulous Funding News

George and Fay Young Foundation Grant

In January 2005, we received a \$12,000 grant from the George and Fay Young Foundation of Dallas for three specific projects within the Environmental Education Program. This is wonderful news, since all of three elements will enhance the visitor’s experience when they come to the PNPC and will support ongoing environmental education programs such as “Go Wild” and “Go Native.” First, large-format signs (2’ tall by 3’ wide) will describe the four habitats on the PNPC site: Bog Garden, Prairie, Sunny Upland, and Streamside/Riparian. Second, individual plant labels will identify and interpret the many wildflowers and shrubs in our Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Demonstration Garden. In fact, we have also discovered that the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center will help us stretch these dollars further by creating the plant identification signs at cost. *This is a wonderful garden-to-garden liaison made possible by the fact that our display garden at the PNPC is one of three satellite gardens in the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center network.* Finally, the Young Foundation funds will help our education staff develop and print copies of a descriptive self-guided tour of the Pineywoods Native Plant Center booklet. We plan to have these available by the end of 2005 so that Elyce Rodewald can use some of them in promoting our Environmental Education programs. We continue to be very grateful to the George and Fay Young Foundation for this continued support of the PNPC, which began in 2001.

The Meadows Foundation Grant

In May, The Meadows Foundation of Dallas awarded Stephen F. Austin State University a \$107,000 grant for “Developing Science and Environmental Education Programs for Public School Students and Teachers.” The project work will be carried out under the direction of Dr. David Creech, with Education Coordinator Elyce Rodewald having primary responsibility for the program development and execution.

The grant will enable Elyce to add more science and environmental education programs to those she

currently presents at both the SFA Mast Arboretum on Wilson Drive and the PNPC. Through this Environmental Education grant, the Arboretum and the PNPC seek to provide hands-on, outdoor activities that will improve the science literacy of both K-12 students and their teachers.

"These activities will allow students to become actively engaged in asking questions, seeking solutions, designing investigations, and then asking new questions," said Elyce Rodewald, education coordinator of the plant center and arboretum. "Students involved in inquiry learning are encouraged to cultivate problem-solving skills by developing an understanding of how to make observations, collect and analyze information, synthesize information, and draw conclusions."

The university has received \$77,000 in funding for the first year of the grant, according to Dr. Jerry Holbert, vice president for university advancement. "Funding for the second year is \$30,000 and must be matched dollar-for-dollar in new donations to the university specifically designated for the project," Holbert said. "This grant will enable SFA to greatly enhance and expand its environmental education program. Literally thousands of children in East Texas will benefit from the generous support of The Meadows Foundation."

The Meadows Foundation is a private philanthropic institution established in 1948 by Algur H. and Virginia Meadows to benefit the people of Texas. The Foundation's mission is to assist the people and institutions of Texas improve the quality and circumstances of life for themselves and future generations. The foundation has particular philanthropic interest in public education (especially in the areas of early child development, enhanced reading skills, and teacher preparation); mental health; and the environment.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Grant

Thanks to the wonderful work grant-writing skills of Elyce Rodewald and Dr. Michael Legg, SFA Forestry professor, the Texas Parks & Wildlife Outdoor Trails Grant program awarded the PNPC \$83,345 to design, clear, and surface 9,000 feet of trails, that will comply with ADA requirements. These PNPC trails were outlined in the 2000 Darrel Morrison master plan and will connect with the LaNana Creek Trail

that begins on Main Street in downtown Nacogdoches. The TP&W grant will fund trail construction, three small bridges, a boardwalk over a wetland area, and an overlook platform. SFA funds will cover costs of benches at the appropriate intervals to meet ADA standards and wetland and archeological surveys. Other partners in the project are the Texas Forest Service, which will help prepare the trail alignment, and the George and Fay Young Foundation, which is funding construction of the signage portion. Work on this project begins in the next few weeks so the trail system can be ready for many more students and visitors in 2006.

Get Ready!
**The 3rd Lone Star Regional Native Plant
Conference will be held
May 24-26, 2006**

Held in association with the Cullowhee Native Plant Conference; more information coming on the Web site and in the next *PNPC News*.

Education Assistant Hired

The Meadows Foundation grant has enabled us to hire an Education Assistant to help Elyce Rodewald develop and present environmental education programs. Amanda Camp is an Environmental Science graduate student at SFA. She has education and interpretation experience gained as a research technician at the Texas Tech Biological Field Station and as an instructor at the Outdoor School at Texas Tech University Center in Junction, Texas. She is a certified facilitator for Project Wild and Project Aquatic Wild, a Texas Master Naturalist, a board member of the Texas Riparian Association, and a volunteer water quality monitor for LCRA.

On August 4, 2005, Amanda facilitated training for 50-plus teachers from all over East Texas. This is the first time in the state of Texas that training in both Project Wild and Project Learning Tree has been offered together as in-service training to increase the knowledge and skills of K-12 teachers.

For more information on educational programming, or to schedule special tours of the PNPC, contact Education Coordinator Elyce Rodewald at 936-468-1832, or erodewald@sfasu.edu.