



The Midwest Bonsai Connection

A Newsletter Published by The Midwest Bonsai Society

June 2001

President's Message

On May 2, Jack Thompson and I met with the President and CEO of the Chicago Botanic Garden, Ms. Barbara Whitney Carr, and various members of her staff, including the Vice President for External Affairs, Ms. Rebecca Girvin-Argon, the Vice President for Garden Operations, Mr. Kris S. Jarantoski, the Director of Development, Ms. Carol C. Gard, and the Manager of Plant Production, Mr. Brian Clark. It was inspiring to hear the Garden's senior management express such enthusiasm about the 19 trees which Mr. Susumu Nakamura donated to the Garden from his personal collection. It was also flattering to be consulted about the timing of, and arrangements for, the Garden's formal acceptance of the donation. Such consultation shows a recognition of our maturity as a Society, and a commitment to working toward a common goal as partners. But this flattering moment will be a memory unless the Society can produce tangible results in the form of fundraising to endow a permanent curator for the Garden's bonsai collection.

By the conclusion of the meeting, we had reached a consensus that Mr. Nakamura's gift will be officially accepted at a ceremony to be held in May or June of next year. The exact date will be fixed before too long, and the Garden will send a formal letter of acknowledgment to Mr. Nakamura, inviting him and his wife to be present at the ceremony as its guests. Other dignitaries will also be invited, including the Japanese Ambassador, and it's possible that Mr. Nakamura will be asked to perform a demonstration the following day. As

we learn more from the Garden about the details of this event, you will see announcements in future newsletters. For now, I think that we in the Society can take great pride that the Garden has asked us to become involved in the planning for this event.

Clearly, the Garden has given a high priority to the bonsai collection, and is looking to the Society for financial support in maintaining it. I want to take immediate advantage of this opportunity to demonstrate that our Society is indeed capable of raising the necessary funds. By a happy coincidence, I had breakfast that morning with the President and CEO of The Hitachi Foundation, Ms. Barbara Dyer, who gave me some very helpful suggestions about finding a "champion" within my own business organization, and I intend to take the initiative in obtaining corporate gifts from Hitachi and other members of the Japanese business and financial community. In this particular area, I think that the Society can take a leadership position in our joint fundraising efforts with the Garden. Our initial goal, however, is an endowment of \$1,000,000, and we cannot achieve that through corporate gifts alone. A substantial part of it must come from our membership and from friends of bonsai throughout the nation, and in the coming months many of you will find that I am an intrepid (and shameless) arm-twister. My current thinking is to have a fundraising campaign within the Society based on matching grants, similar to the campaigns waged by WTTW and WFMT. In the next few weeks, I will be asking some of my fellow members to participate with me as matching

donors; with the idea that we will kick-off our campaign concurrently with the exhibit in August. I would like to have \$100,000 in pledges and matching grants by the end of the exhibit. Perhaps that goal is too ambitious, but I think it's worth a try.

Our limited experience with fundraising means that we will necessarily have to coordinate closely with Ms. Gard and members of her staff. We must work hard to keep each other advised of our fundraising "initiatives", and to be sure we are not interfering with each other's efforts. All of this will require a considerable amount of organization, and the Society's board of directors will shortly appoint a fundraising committee which will designate a person to serve as liaison to the Garden. Obviously, we will need many of you to help with the phone-calling and the letter-writing, so at the June meeting I will be issuing a call for volunteers as we begin to organize our campaign.

I will end this month's message with a plea: Those of you who make annual gifts to universities, charities and other worthy causes, please give serious thought to diverting some of this year's giving to the endowment of a permanent curator for the Garden's bonsai collection. And those of you with the means, please give serious thought to participating in a program of matching grants. Working together, I have absolutely no doubt that we can justify the Garden's decision to give its bonsai collection a high priority and to make our Society a member of the "team" raising the funds to maintain it.

Steve

Herb Gustafson and the Tree from Hell

At our May meeting those of us attending had the pleasure of watching Herb Gustafson tame the stock tree from hell.

Herb had seen a picture of this tree and had selected it from the picture. At the meeting he was looking at the real tree for the first time. His face was a picture of uncertainty. The fact that his audience was as unimpressed with this tree as he was didn't help. Many of them were obviously expecting him to chuck the whole idea and wondering why he didn't.

I have to describe this thing. Imagine four sticks coming out of this huge, grotesque, plastic pot. The four sticks were all the same length, four feet, and all the about the same diameter, two inches at best. They were probably juniper and covered with little branches that looked from a distance like fuzz.

Well, Herb got a grip on himself and picked up a saw and cut about a foot off the top of that monstrous pot and then hacked the root ball down to fit in the pot that was left. The saw didn't break and the pot didn't fall off the table so by the time he finished that job we could see that he was feeling a little stronger and not quite so eager to be on a plane back to California.

One of those stick-branches had a couple of smaller stick-branches coming off of it so he whacked those off. He also got rid of one of the original four so that he had an acceptable three branches. He trimmed those down to different lengths depending on their thickness (which was only about 4mm different).

Then he gave the audience a coffee break before he started wiring.

His wiring of that peach fuzz was really nice. He started those little branches down and then gave them a little up-turn at the tip. I always like that.

Congratulations, Herb! You did a nice job on that dog. It just goes to show that a good bonsai artist can take a piece of gas-pipe and do something with it.

Actually I really believe this tree or this planting will be very nice in just a few years and that Herb attained his stated goal of doing a tree and getting on the plane back home and leaving a tree that is not doomed to die in a few weeks.

Program Chairman Column

I want to thank Herb Gustafson for his wonderful demonstration. His sense of humor only helped make his work on difficult material more interesting and understandable. I learned a new technique for trimming away those pesky stubs that are always left after removing branches. His positioning of the branches after wiring reinforced the instruction I have received; low on the trunk down and then up at the tip; high on the trunk gradually reaching up. As I have indicated, it was difficult material to work on and he did a superlative job.

I would like to emphasize the values of the occasional workshop with a visiting master. These workshops provide an intensive 3 hours to work on your tree(s), allowing you to practice what you have been taught, to gain new insights on the art of bonsai, and to gain new insights from a different and more experienced set of eyes.

I do not often have 3 hours free during my average week to work on trees (simply too many demands on my time). Having this scheduled time set aside allows me to focus for that brief period. Discussing options with a visiting master expands my own vision. These workshops should not be missed.

With the the idea of different viewpoints in mind, the June meeting will be a six point demonstration. We have purchased six raw stock Green Mound Junipers, staked to about 18 to 20 inches tall with 3/4 inch trunks. I have asked 6 different people to bring their tools so each one can style one of the trees.

The purpose of this is to explore the different vision that artists bring to similar material. I have asked each person to talk about what they see and what they think about in arriving at the style.

Members can stay with one person or roam between the six different tables. After about 30 minutes, we will regroup and talk about each tree, the styling choices and the vision of each artist for the future of the tree. By doing this, we can all see the possibilities in beginning raw material.

Finally, I would like to express our deep gratitude to Dick Farwell for donating his trees to the society at the last meeting. It must hurt to part with bonsai that you have invested so many years of thought and care to. I respect and honor your wisdom in knowing and caring about what is best for the future of your trees. Your trees have all gone to good homes and will be well cared for. Thank you very much.

See you all June 4.

James Fairchild

Calendar of Events

June 3 in the a.m.
Beginner's Workshop
Chicago Botanic Garden

June 2-3
The Michigan All-State Bonsai Show
Frederik Meijer Gardens

June 4 - 7:30 p.m.
Midwest Bonsai Society Meeting
Chicago Botanic Garden

Elgin Bonsai Group

By M. P. Voynovich

During World War II Alex Alexander was serving in the Army in the Pacific and, at the end of the War, found himself in Japan, where he fell in love with bonsai.

Back in the States he started practicing the art of bonsai and became the most proficient bonsai-man in the area - also one of the founding fathers of the Midwest Bonsai Society in 1967.

The Elgin Bonsai Group was established in 1970 or 1971 (nobody remembers the exact date) under Alex's leadership as a study unit of the Midwest Bonsai Society. We used to meet at Morgan's Flowers in Elgin where Alex was a partner. As a general rule, the membership was limited to 10 people. Over the years, some people would drop out or die. The prospective replacement had to be acceptable to the remaining membership.

For the first several years, we would bring John Naka for a week of intensive workshops. Alex would find excellent bonsai material and, under John's guidance, the rest of us would happily whack away. Later on, Tom Tesza of Tesza & Sons nursery in South Elgin, joined the Group and, through his professional contacts, provided us with equally excellent material.

The Midwest Bonsai Society had decided to host the International Bonsai Convention in 1977. It was decided that we should have two masters from Japan as keynote lecturers and workshop leaders. In spite of great efforts by Charles Getman, at the time President of MBS, through lengthy correspondence via official bonsai channels and a trip to Japan, he was unsuccessful.

Time was running out and Alex flew to Japan. Through personal contacts, he met Mr. Susumu Nakamura, who accepted the invitation, and in turn, suggested Mr. Mori as a second choice. We were saved! General consensus by the guests at the convention from all over the USA and South America was that this was the best convention they ever attended.

The Elgin Bonsai Group decided then and there to invite Nakamura-san to come to Elgin the next year as our teacher. And we kept it up every year since then. Over the years he became not only a greatly respected teacher but also a dear friend. Quite a few times the EBG gave him on loan to the Midwest Bonsai Society for lectures and workshops.

In 1985, Nakamura-san proposed a way to encourage the Nipon Bonsai Association to donate bonsai trees to the Botanic Gardens. Unfortunately, due to poor management of the negotiations, nothing came of it.

Nakamura-san, being the giving person that he is, and out of love for his friends in the mid-west, decided to do things on his own. He donated 23 of his best trees to the Botanic Garden, and the trees will be on display for our enjoyment, hopefully, in a month or two.

Bonsai lovers of the Chicago Metropolitan area, and indeed the of whole country, owe Mr. Susumu Nakamura a debt of gratitude for the magnificent gift he has bestowed on us all.

The Growth of the Bonsai Artist - Part III

You will remember from April that I have one tree that died, one tree that I worked on in a workshop, and one San JoseI that I bought to replace the dead tree. I had to repot the San JoseI immediately because it was so rootbound. The tree that I worked on in the workshop is going crazy! It has this one branch coming out of the top that is at least two feet tall - just since the weather got warm! What am I supposed to do about that?

Then I have three trees that I have not touched that I just couldn't help buying in a buying frenzy. What am I going to do? Go to a meeting, I guess, and ask questions. So that is what I did. I tucked my wild growing tree under my arm and carried it to the meeting.

So, what did they tell me? Let it grow for a while. It will thicken the trunk. You can cut it back some and cut some of the top branches back or off so the bottom branches can get more light. That will help thicken the trunk. Then wait a couple of years.

Then - "have you had any classes yet?"

"Yeah, sure, I've had a workshop or two."

"Workshops only last 3 hours for one session. Classes go for 5 or 6 weeks for 3 hours each session". "Why don't you go to Yasukunai and sign up for a beginner class?"

I did it. I signed up. I was a little late but I got lucky and there was room in a beginner class.

I went to this two-car garage in back of Yasukunai along with 11 others and the instructor started talking about bonsai and rootage and the facing of trees and trunks and tools and watering and fertilizer and insecticide and my head started to spin. It was lucky that he handed out copies of what he covered or I wouldn't have gotten it all.

- To Be Continued

From The Editor

At the May 7 meeting a strange and wonderful thing happened. Mr. Richard Farwell came to the meeting early and asked for some help bringing in some trees which he wished to donate to the Midwest Bonsai Society.

Yes, I said donate!

He said we could sell them at any price and use the proceeds for the Society or we could give them away to members.

For personal reasons Dick could no longer take proper care of these trees. I could see that they had received very good care at one time and for a very long time. They were now root-bound but they had been trimmed and cared for regularly and it must have been painful to give them up.

I can only say from all of us, "Thank you, Dick, and may I have the character to do the same".

I will not always take advantage of my position to use this venue as a soap-box but the above happened

along with two other events which gave me a jab which I cannot ignore.

The first took place at the meeting. I was talking about "the good old days" of the Society with one of the original members when this member started talking about how snooty the members were to them when they first joined and how that has not really changed. Now I have heard this before. As a matter of fact, I know of members who have joined Prairie States or Milwaukee for this very reason.

The next morning, I started talking to a man at Yasukunai and I mentioned the gift from Richard Farwell and its disposition. This man immediately said, "Well, I am not surprised that the trees were sold. Nothing is free at the Midwest Bonsai Society."

We continued to talk and I found out that he had changed to Prairie States partly because of his Coleus Bonsai. Then I remembered him! Every spring he used to bring to the meeting

a Coleus Bonsai! It was well styled with a nicely tapered woody trunk with good rootage. It had all the attributes of a very good one-hand bonsai.

Some of the members actually sneered at the coleus bonsai. It was not a tree!

Let me ask those sneerers a question. Have you ever seen a boxwood tree, or a cotoneaster tree, or an azalea tree?

I think we have reached the age as an organization where we need to re-examine our superior attitudes. We need young blood and we cannot afford to frighten it off.

Leonard has some nice wooden stands and Ivan has gotten in a load of pots. Some of them are really exciting! I will be bringing some more trees to the meeting with a few interesting additions.

On June 3 we will have the first beginners' workshop. The material will be extraordinary!

Larry Larimer

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