



The Midwest Bonsai Connection

A Newsletter Published by The Midwest Bonsai Society

September 2001

President's Message

I want to begin by thanking all of the volunteers and exhibitors who contributed so much time and effort in making this year's Mid-America Exhibit a success. In judging the exhibit, Warren Hill commented on the extremely high level of quality, and said that he was forced to deviate somewhat from our normal judging criteria in order to make the process as fair and equitable as possible with so many fine trees on exhibit. Thus, for example, he decided not to judge any tree which was exhibited without a stand (normally, this is not a judging criteria). He was also quite impressed with the quality of the trees exhibited in the novice category as evidenced by the number of ribbons he awarded to them. While his time with us was brief, since he was forced to return to the National Arboretum on Saturday afternoon, he nevertheless took with him a vivid memory of the sophistication and refinement which those of us in the Midwest particularly in the Chicago metropolitan area- have achieved in the design of our Bonsai.

As most of you will recall, the basic design of this year's exhibit was first introduced in 1997, when Mr. Susumu Nakamura was the featured guest artist and judge at the Society's 20th Annual Exhibit. Unfortunately, time brings change to all things, and the layout and decoration of our exhibit is no exception. Those of you who inspected them closely will no doubt have noticed that the banners in the Great Hall are looking a bit frayed and that the colors have faded. The tables forming the chevron in the middle of the Hall - which were thought to have been a

great improvement when they first appeared in 1997 are definitely too low for viewing the trees at eye level, and the design-concept has grown a bit stale with the passage of time. The show screens are mismatched and showing signs of wear. The burlap tablecloths are stained, and having table skirts in two different colors becomes more disconcerting with each passing year. I fear that the conclusion is inescapable: the show needs a makeover. Thus at the next board meeting on Sept. 5, I intend to introduce a resolution calling for the complete redesign of next year's exhibit. It is, after all, the 25th anniversary of the exhibit, and the featured guest artist and judge, Mr. Hatsumi Terakawa, will make next year's exhibit an international event. He is one of the world's leading Bonsai experts, and has made only a few visits to the U. S. in recent years. It seems only fitting that the design of next year's exhibit should reflect the stature of the event. So you will be hearing more on this in the months to come, since work must begin right away. Fortunately, the Chicago Botanic Garden has already indicated that it will enthusiastically support this effort.

The lack of advertising for this year's exhibit was a major disappointment, and will be the subject of much improvement as we enter into preliminary discussions with the Garden to prepare for next year's event. On the brighter side, however, the Society's new website is now fully functional, and basic information about next year's exhibit will have been posted on it by the time you receive this newsletter. Further details will appear as workshops and demonstrations are scheduled. I invite all

of you to visit the website, particularly since you will shortly be able to download an edited version of Mr. Hill's judging critique, which he kindly permitted us to videotape. I feel sure that all of the exhibitors could benefit from his comments; I know that I will. His comments will also be available to societies located in other parts of the country, many of which have expressed an interest in visiting our website in order to gain access to his critique.

In visiting the website you will also see two other events which will shortly be appearing on the schedule. These are the Flower and Garden Show in March, and the formal ceremony accepting the Nakamura Collection in June. Please be sure to add these dates to your calendar, and watch for other upcoming events as well. For example, there will be a workshop with a noted Bonsai master from Japan, Mr. Hiroyoshi Yamagi, on Sunday, September 16 (which is nearly full, so please see Jim Fairchild right away if you are interested in participating). Also, don't forget Prairie State's annual exhibit at Cantigny Park in Winfield, Illinois on Sept. 29 and 30.

Finally, I am pleased to end this month's message on a high note: following a meeting with the Chicago Botanic Garden on August 21, the fundraising has begun to endow a permanent curator for the Garden's Bonsai collection. Soon I will be calling on all of you to help with this challenging project.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the Society's next meeting on Monday, Sept. 10.

Steve

From The Editor

Jack Thompson received the Jules Ladany award for 2001. This is a silver bowl awarded each year to the person who has done the most for the Midwest Bonsai Society. It is not enough to be a great member of the Board or to work hard at the show or in between shows. The award also requires that the recipient produce over his or her membership a few nice or very nice trees and keep those trees alive for a few years. We are a bonsai society, not a social group.

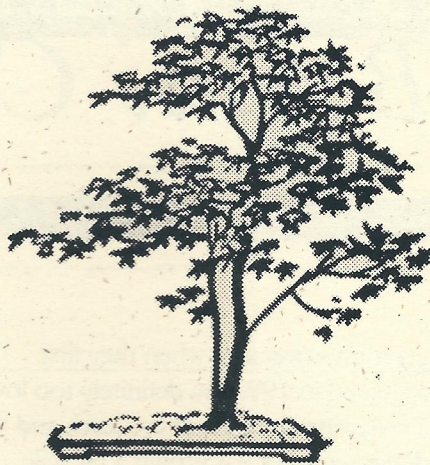
Jack certainly deserves the honor. He is the accepted leader and director of the faithful volunteers who take care of the Chicago Botanic Garden collection. Jack is currently our First Vice President and he has served many hours on the Board. Jack was one of the three "volunteers" to go to Maryland and pot and bring back to the garden the Nakamura Collection. Not to slight the other two, Brian Clark from the CBG and Shig Ito from MBS.

The Show was a dandy. This year there were fewer trees but the quality was noticeably better than last year's entries. As a group we seem to get better every year. I hope this continues. Judging by the quality of the novice entries this trend will continue.

The weather was a disappointment, and the attendance was about 60% lower than last year according to the spokesperson from the CBG. Their figure is based on the number of cars that come in when the weather is good and there are a lot more cars, do those people come to the show or do they go elsewhere? I would like to find out.

I photographed some of the more prestigious trees. I will try to run a picture of one as a test. We shall see.

There will be a Beginners' Workshop at the Botanic Garden on September 29 at 9:00 a.m. This will be conducted by member Leonard Wegryn.



**IF YOU
HAVE:**

Info for the newsletter
or the web page
or archival material

PLEASE LEAVE
A MESSAGE FOR
LARRY LARIMER AT
312-226-2442
FAX: 312-226-5419
e-mail: splashpix@earthlink.net

BRING YOUR TREES TO MEETINGS!

During or just after our July meeting one of our long-standing members asked me why "the new people" seemed reluctant to bring trees to the meetings for advice and critique and help in styling.

I didn't answer the question. I know the answer but I am not sure that he would understand my answer. This man has been a member for almost 30 years. This means that trees he started when he was "new people" have been worked on and styled and re-styled for 30 years. His view of these trees is different than mine and I have been a member for 10 years and am probably looked upon as an "old hand".

I am not an "old hand" at bonsai. Neither does Peter feel that he is an "old hand". Just when we start to feel that we are "old hands", a tree that we started ten years ago, dies or loses a branch.

I understand the problem faced by a new member. It seems a little embarrassing to bring a tree in that one has only worked on for two years and take that tree to someone who has trees that have been bonsai for 20 years for advice.

This brings to mind Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Things sure look different depending on where you happen to be standing.

Of course I know of members of long-standing that are very difficult to approach with my minor styling or tree problems but I know of others who will knock themselves out trying to help. There are other members who give the appearance of being impossible to approach but really will be very helpful.

So, if you need some help with a tree and do not know who to go to, ask me. I will give you a list of "old timers" who will be glad to devote a lot of time to answering your question and solving your problem. You may be surprised at who I recommend. You may also be surprised that two of these "old timers" may disagree with each other about how to approach the problem.

Regardless, you should listen and look and you will learn. Just remember we sometimes learn by finding out how not to approach a problem.

Don't forget! Bonsai is an art form. Bonsai is an illusion. Each of us look at trees differently and we may all be right about a particular tree.

Also remember that your bonsai is a growing, living thing. It will not be the same ten years from now as it is today. Also remember that you are growing too. You will look at your tree differently ten years from now. That is a promise.

THE ENDOWMENT

In the last two or three months, Steve has talked about an ENDOWMENT. He has suggested that this fund be to the total amount of \$1,000,000 and that it be raised jointly by the Chicago Botanic Garden and the Midwest Bonsai Society.

The interest on this money will be used to pay the annual salary of a Curator of the Bonsai Collection of the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Why does the CBG now need a curator for its collection? The collection has been in existence for over 25 years. It has been well taken care of by volunteer members of the Midwest Bonsai Society over many years. Among them, Jack Wilson, Alex Alexander, Shig Ito, Jack Thompson, Rich Helminiak,

The answer to "why a curator now" is a not so difficult to understand. There are now 165 trees in the collection. More than half of these are top-quality bonsai and they need constant work and attention. Another one-quarter of the remainder have great potential. More trees were added to the collection last week. Next year the Nakamura Collection will be formally added to the CBG Collection. By this time next year there should be 200 trees in the collection. All of these will need constant care and careful planning

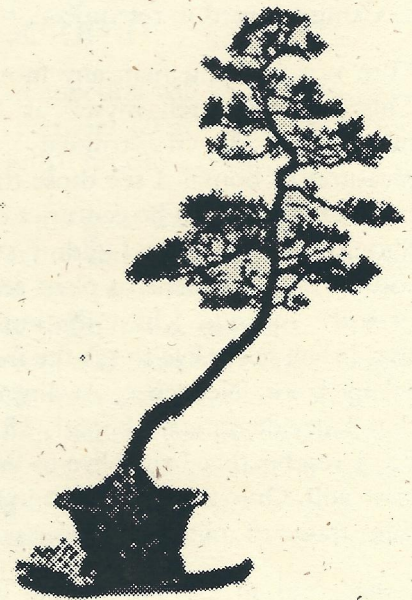
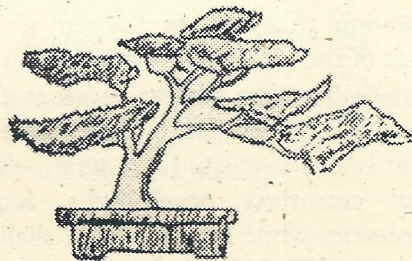
for their growth, possible re-styling and proper display. Most of them are of such high quality that to not take care of them would be a crime.

Why should the Midwest Bonsai Society become involved with the Chicago Botanic Garden's need for, funding for, and search for a proper curator?

The answer to this question is also a simple one. We are involved and have always been totally involved in the Botanic Garden's Bonsai collection. Our continued concern in this collection is a responsibility which we must share.

What are this person's qualifications? The curator must be a qualified bonsai artist. The curator must be a good speaker publically and privately. The person must be a good manager for he or she will have to direct the destiny of 200 trees from the beginning. This will require the ability to direct the efforts of the CBG horticulturists who take care of feeding, watering, and spraying the trees and the MBS volunteers as well.

LARRY



Visit Our New Website

www.midwestbonsai.org

We have added lots of useful information and tips to help you grow your bonsai, make sure you check it out!

Calendar of Events

September 10 - 7:30 p.m.

Midwest Bonsai Society Meeting

September 29 & 30
Prairie States Bonsai Show

September 29 - 9:00 a.m.
Beginners Workshop at the Garden

September 16 - 1:00 p.m.
Hiro Yamagi Workshop
In Yasukunai Classroom

Starting All Over Again In Bonsai by Jack Wilson

Looking forward in retrospect:

"I'm not a young man any more." This is what I tell myself as I'm hopelessly drawn toward the pleasures of bonsai. I see those thick trunks that seem to be centuries old. Should I regret that I didn't start sooner? I'm reluctant to plant seeds or strike cuttings. I have the notion that I shall never live to see the fruits of my labor. Nonsense. At any age that I decide to start bonsai, 15 or 55, I resolve that I shall live to be at least 200. Only then shall I be in the right frame of mind to do bonsai.

I shall read all the books I can find that are written in English. There aren't that many. I shall build a library of most of these books, many to be re-read later. I shall bind the bonsai periodicals and file them in my library for later reference. Also, I shall add a few Japanese books for the value of their diagrams and pictorial inspiration.

I shall attend all the workshops and demonstrations conducted by local and visiting experts. I shall attend as many bonsai conventions and symposia as I can. Events like these can amount to crash courses for me, especially as a beginner.

I shall join a bonsai club early during my pursuit of bonsai. And I'll get involved, too, but not so much in the administrative affairs that the club becomes the hobby rather than the art of bonsai. We can't move forward in the vacuum of solitude. We need the stimulation of others in order to create anything worthwhile.

On the other hand, I shall not save all my projects for group activity. I shall do much of my work in the seclusion of my back yard. I accept the belief that works of art are rarely created in a classroom. Not that I expect my efforts in bonsai to become works of art, but it seems correct to equate bonsai with the various art media.

I shall keep records in the form of a diary that I can refer to from year to year. I also shall maintain a card file for the major trees, recording age, soil mixtures, shows entered, containers used, etc. I shall use the camera as often as possible, not so much for the artistic merit of the pictures, but for a graphic record of the changes in the bonsai. The mental images of my bonsai will become somewhat distorted due to bonsai's ever changing nature. I'll certainly be surprised later when I see some of my bonsai's form in the earlier stages. It will be a reminder, too, of a lot of honest mistakes.

During my first season, I shall resist the temptation to buy a finished bonsai just to have something respectable to display. I shall leave this for the collectors, the types who can fund this approach and give fine trees the proper maintenance. However, I shall not overlook stock that is grown expressly for bonsaiists. This stock is developed by just a very few growers in this country and can be very worthy. It is grown both in the ground and in containers. There is a lot of room left for someone like me to carry it further as bonsai.

Assuming that I have learned the basics of the art, I shall work my way through as many of the styles as I can. And I'll keep an open mind toward all the styles. Each style will offer countless possibilities for expression, while I know that I shall naturally gravitate toward my favorite forms.

Being overly conscious of style and form should not prevent me from engaging in good horticultural practices - for example, the proper preparation of growing medium for each type of bonsai. I can't start concentrating on this too soon.

I should make good use of old terra firma from the very beginning. The first book that I'll read, *Bonsai*, by

Ann Kimbel Pipe, will illustrate how bonsai can be effectively developed in the ground. When I use this method to cultivate a broom style elm, John Naka will later tell me, "You have saved 50 years."

I shall exercise patience. Instant bonsai will be rare. If the decision is to cut, then I shall firmly lop it off. But, if I'm not quite sure, I'll leave the branch on until later. Besides, it's better for the health of the tree to work slowly. A rare exception to this will be when some stock might be approached as being expendable in order to complete an entire exercise in a short time such as a workshop. However, this will be kept to a minimum. I shall not take John Naka too seriously in terms of his use of time when he does so much in order to complete a demonstration in such a short period. I shall spread my efforts over a reasonable length of time. Otherwise, I'll have a lot of dead trees on my hands.

After a few years of experience with bonsai, I shall make my pilgrimage to Japan. If with some "beginner's luck" I've won a few ribbons in a local show, a trip to Japan will be a shattering experience. The leveling effect will be complete. I shall return to my bonsai with different standards in mind. While in Japan I shall observe practices that have never been pointed out to me. I shall see maples, for example, that are on benches all day under the direct sun. They have shorter internodes and a better leaf color than mine back home. I shall observe why their styles reflect the Japanese surroundings and begin to understand the possibilities of our developing a Western approach, perhaps.

I shall become a part of a digging expedition, especially to our great West. Before I go, I shall do my homework to insure a better survival

possibility for the wonderful stock that I shall gather. I may spread the adventure over a period of two years, perhaps, selecting and preparing roots one year and returning the next year to dig. I shall also dig locally for bonsai material. I'll be able to handle this better than some exotic material that I'll be tempted to struggle with in the wrong temperature zone.

I shall not be too anxious to divest myself of seemingly second rate trees. I'll tend them off to the side somewhere as they do their own thing. With little help from me they may turn into real gems later.

Regarding purchases, sometimes I shall come across some bargains. It will be well to always have some good extra stock on hand when one of the visiting masters conducts a workshop. Also, it will be interesting to try different approaches to style with similar stock.

Nursery stock is one thing, but pots and stands are something else. If I

don't seize the opportunity to buy an antique Chinese container or a finely crafted mame display stand at the right moment, the chance for me may be gone forever. However, anytime will be the right time for the necessary purchase, such as the container that is just right for that group planting.

Finally, after ten years of my entanglement with bonsai, someone will ask me, "Will you tell us what you would do if you were to start bonsai all over again?" So within 10 minutes I shall tell them without differentiating between what I had, in fact, actually done or what I really wish I had done.

Jack Wilson



FUNGUS ALERT

In my bonsai class the other night, Ivan warned about the danger of fungus with this lovely warm, humid weather we have been having.

I boasted that it had not been a problem for me. Even my elms which have always gotten the black-spotted leaves have shown no sign of fungus. All of this is due to spraying with fairly regular doses of NEEM on about a three week schedule.

Everything has been looking so good that I didn't bother spraying weekend before last.

Well, I got caught! I looked at trees Sunday and got a surprise. My hemlock which has never had fungus has got it. One of my Japanese white pine has caught the fungus. My elms show almost no sign of a problem but they probably will show up with something.

Needless to say, I sprayed immediately.

(Unfortunately, due to lack of space, this could not run in August.)

-Larry

Program Chairman Column

The meeting will be held September 10 at 7:30 p.m. in the Multi-Purpose Room.

What a great show!!! Though the weather did not cooperate fully, the show was well attended. We had more novice trees than ever before and most were outstanding. The consensus was this show was of the highest quality. I know that Warren Hill complained he had a lot of trouble giving awards because there were so many high quality trees.

The whole three hours of judging were recorded. I've asked Tom Longfellow to edit this down to 45 to 60 minutes so we can all watch the judge's comments as he reviewed the trees. This will be a marvelous opportunity to see just what made a tree stand out, what the weaknesses were, and his suggestions for improvement.

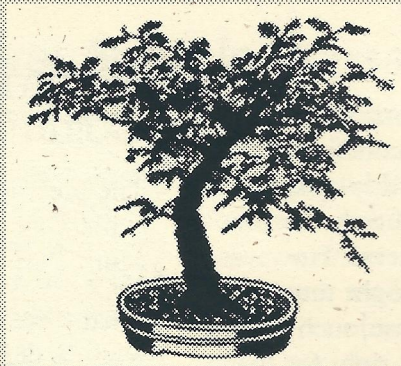
I always find it highly informative to learn what others see in each bonsai to like and dislike. I have my own opinions about relative strengths and weaknesses, but it is always good to hear from others, particularly from a master with an established international reputation.

I have asked some of the top award winners to bring their trees to the meeting so we can look at the trees as Warren Hill comments on them, and to see what qualities gained them the awards.

As always, you are welcome to bring your trees to the meeting for show and tell, for help, and for comments.

See you September 10!

Jim Fairchild



Here is a summary of the awards:

BEST TREE IN SHOW

Steve Snoke with a Needle Juniper in weeping literati style.

ROSETTE RECIPIENTS

- Al Fisher with a Japanese White Pine in slant style.
- Fred Holubow with a Black Pine in semi-cascade.
- Jean Jenick with a Firethorn/Pyracantha in informal-upright style.
- Jim Fairchild with a Needle Juniper in Raft style.
- Sierra Charlie with a Beech in Formal Upright style.
- Steve Snoke with a group planting of Needle Juniper.
- Jack Fried with an informal upright of Japanese Snowball.

THE ROSETTE/MABA AWARD

Jim Erlenborn with an Eastern White Cedar

(The MABA award goes to bonsai created with indigenous American material.)

PROFESSIONAL CLASS

Pro Cup #1 Bill Valvanis for a Japanese White Pine informal upright

Pro Cup #2 Jack Douthitt for a Ponderosa Pine informal upright

Pro Cup #3 Jack Fried for a Privet multiple trunk.

NOVICE CLASS

Blue Ribbon to Chris Heck for a False Cypress Bunjin

Blue Ribbon to Tom Longfellow for a Japanese Garden Juniper Cascade

Blue Ribbon to Tom Longfellow for a Twin Trunk White Spruce

Red Ribbon to Bob Sanchez for a Korean Boxwood Rock Planting

Red Ribbon to Brian Hill for a Golden Larch

Red Ribbon to James Baley for a Fig Informal Upright

Red Ribbon to James Baley for a Black Pine Slant

Red Ribbon to Rich Helminiak for a Sergeant Juniper Slant

Red Ribbon to Rich Helminiak for a Trident Maple Informal Upright

Red Ribbon to Ron Fortmann for a Privet Clump

Red Ribbon to Tom Longfellow for a Cotoneaster Informal Upright

Red Ribbon to Tom Longfellow for an Erodium Informal Upright

White Ribbon to Bob Sanchez for a Golden Arbovitae Informal Upright

White Ribbon to Brian Hill for a Prickly Pear

White Ribbon to Ed Polley for a Shefflera Grove

OPEN CLASS

Due to lack of space I did not run the ribbon winners in the Open class.

There were 13 Blue Ribbons, 21 Red Ribbons, and 23 White Ribbons.

OH, THOSE GOOD OLD DAYS!

I have had the opportunity of looking through some old records. This month we will had the show and it so happens that I have the records from the show in 1981, twenty years ago. How many familiar names are there? Take a look.

Jack Wilson	12 trees entered
Ivan Watters	15 trees entered
(One of those was Thyme)	
Alex Alexander	12 trees entered
Lorraine &	
Jack May	5 trees entered
Frank Takahashi	24 trees entered
Keith Scott	3 trees entered
Peter Voyňovich	4 trees entered
Don Wilkomm	7 trees entered
Les Lange	7 trees entered
Steve Lehuta	7 trees entered
Kevin Jones	3 trees entered
Mary Himoto	3 trees entered
Jack Fried	1 tree entered
Tom Tecza	1 tree entered
Fran &	
Merv Hiller	16 trees entered
Best of show	Tom Tecza
Merit awards	Jack Wilson Steve Lehuta Mary Himoto Don Wilkomm Kevin Jones
Blue Ribbons	Les Lange (2) Fran & Merv Hiller (2) Frank Takahashi (3) Ivan Watters (2) Jack Fried

There were other entries and other awards. This is just a sampling of a few names you might be familiar with from 20 years ago.

Share with us your memories of Bonsai experiences. Please leave a message for LARRY LARIMER at 312-226-2442, FAX: 312-226-5419 or e-mail: splashpix@earthlink.net

Midwest Bonsai Society 24th Annual Mid-America Bonsai Exhibition

JUDGING REPORT

The judging for the show began promptly at 9:00 AM, Friday morning, August 17. Mr. Warren Hill, Curator of the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum in Washington D.C served as the guest judge. Accompanying him were Ed Polley and Len Wegryn, to track the judging. I was there to operate the video camera. After taking a walk around the exhibition hall, Mr. Hill began his evaluation with the Novice class entries.

A review pattern quickly emerged as Mr. Hill would look over each table, then begin his critique for each tree. He was very forthcoming in offering what he liked about a particular tree, what he thought could be improved, and in some cases, he even made suggestions as to what might be done to make the tree stronger. MBS will provide a preview of the tapes at future meetings. We will also try to make portions of them available for download via the web site.

Once the Novice class was judged, Mr. Hill moved to the Open category. Again the preliminary walk through preceded the systematic evaluation. He commented that the quality of the collection was extremely high, making his job very difficult. Then the critiques began in earnest.

Mr. Hill quickly made the point that he would not give an award to an Open-class tree that did not have a stand. His point was that it made the tree look unfinished, and due to the overall high quality of the entries, this proved to be a consistent means of eliminating some very nice bonsai. In some cases, he asked to remove ribbons that he had presented, when another look revealed that there was no stand.

The stands did not have to be fancy or ornate. He commented most

favorably on the ones used by Jim Fairchild. Jim's stands were very simple boards, nicely arranged under the tree. Mr. Hill's said that they provided a base for the presentation, looked nice, and did not distract from the bonsai.

Mr. Hill also did not like rocks, specifically those that were included in the pot but did not serve as an integrated design element. In one case he suggested moving a rock to the other side of a windswept bonsai, to make the curve of the stone reinforce the curve in the tree. Root-over rock, or slab plantings were considered fine, but he just did not want to see a bonsai that had small rocks around the edges of the pot.

There were other trees that Mr. Hill would not judge, explaining that they were "badger" trees. He explained that the Japanese call trees "badgers" if they try to fool one into thinking that they are a complete, natural tree, when in reality, they are assembled using a piece of driftwood and younger stock. He thought the two he found were well done but did not consider them true bonsai.

Once all of the ribbons had been awarded, he began the presentation of the Rosette Awards of Merit. He spent a great deal of time making his selections, going back to examine trees very closely before he made up his mind.

The Best Tree award also took a great deal of deliberation. Mr. Hill repeatedly returned to Jim Fairchild's raft, then would go back to Steve Snoke's Juniper. Finally, he decided on the winner - Steve's Juniper.

We finished the judging, just as the noon deadline was reached. Unfortunately, we still had the Professional category to evaluate. Complicating the matter was the fact that the hall was quickly filling with

visitors eager to see the trees! Adding to the mix, Rich Helminiak and all the MBS volunteers that he could gather for the task, had begun moving the trees that had been judged to the courtyard area to provide more room for viewing in the hall. Overall, it was an amazing spectacle. Nothing was hurt, neither tree, nor person.

We began the Professional category, in some instances, having to ask visitors to step aside so that we could see the tree. Mr. Hill was very nice throughout, and continued to give his comments despite the confusion. The judging was quickly becoming an ad hoc lecture by Mr. Hill, with a growing contingent of bonsai enthusiasts in his wake.

Mr. Hill had to hurry and prepare for a workshop he was giving at 1:00 P.M. He thanked us for our help and again stated how much he enjoyed visiting our exhibition - both due to the quality of the bonsai, and the enthusiasm of the members. Personally, it was a fantastic morning having an opportunity to learn what he liked and about our society's nicest trees. I appreciate the opportunity to expand my knowledge of bonsai.

Best regards,
Tom Longfellow



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