

The Brooksider

Published by Friends of Brookside Gardens, Inc.



February, 2014

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

The early months of a new year are transitional ones, as winter tries to keep its place with frigid temperatures, and spring tempts us with blue and sunny skies. They are also a time to reflect on the last months of 2013 and to look forward to the months to come.



After a full year and a half of planning, *Holidays in the Garden, A Silent Auction to Benefit Brookside Gardens*, was held on November 9th. It was a great success, chaired by Freddi Hammerschlag and co-chaired by Barbara Waite-Jaques. The event drew about 180 people and netted over \$17,000 for Brookside Gardens. Thanks to all the chair people of the various committees, to the 70 volunteers and to all of you who attended. It was one of the most successful FOBG events ever! We hope to hold another Silent Auction perhaps in two years.

During the first week of December, FOBG members plucked boxwood and other greens, and spent several days creating beautiful holiday centerpieces for the Holiday Greens Sale. This fund-raising event was chaired by Joanie Palmer, who recruited an enthusiastic and artistic group of FOBG volunteers. It's great fun to spend several hours preparing for the holidays in this way, so please think of joining us for this event at the end of this year.

While fundraising is the prime FOBG activity, our role as active advocates for Brookside Gardens is also essential. The Montgomery County Council is currently engaged in

its annual budget process. On behalf of the nearly 900 members of FOBG and the 400,000 annual visitors of Brookside Gardens, I testified before the County Council on February 5th regarding two projects in the FY15 Capital Budget and FY15-20 Capital Improvements Program. We asked for their support for infrastructure improvements and the entrance to the gardens as well as for the new greenhouse.

You can be part of this advocacy by writing to the Montgomery County Council to ask for their support so that we can continue to maintain and enhance the beautiful Gardens we love!

Our next big FOBG event is the annual Orchid Sale. The dates are March 15th and 16th and this year, it will be at Behnke Nurseries garden center in Beltsville, Maryland. The replacement of the HVAC system in the Visitors' Center and the anticipated construction for Phase I and II of the Master Plan for Brookside Gardens have changed the venue of a number of Brookside events. Be sure to check your issue of Xperience for all schedules.

We welcome two new members to the Board of FOBG. Kathy Kircher and Barbara Schwarz exemplify the enthusiasm and dedication of the Board members, and I am grateful to serve with all of them.

Keep up to date on all FOBG activities, schedules, newsletters, and photos by making it a habit to go to our beautiful new website, created by FOBG Board member Nithya Ragahavan. The URL is www.bgfriends.org.

Suzanne Carbone, President



ORCHID SHOW & SALE

Co-sponsored by the
**Rock Creek
Orchid Club**

March 15 & 16
9am-5pm
Open to all!

- ❖ Vibrant display by Rock Creek Orchid Club
- ❖ Orchids & merchandise from top area growers
- ❖ Repotting by Behnke's Carol Allen (nominal fee)
- ❖ Advice from experts
- ❖ Raffle

Location this year:
Behnke Nurseries, Inc.
11300 Baltimore Road
Beltsville, MD 20705

Proceeds benefit Brookside Gardens!

www.bgfriends.org

In this and future issues of FOBG's *The Brooksider*, we will include a new series of articles titled "Brookside from the Inside." These articles are based on conversations with the Brookside Gardens' staff horticulturists whose inspiration, skill and hard work create and re-create the gardens that we love. We will look at what drew BG staff members to a professional life in horticulture and public gardens, and how they feel about working in a changing environment that is always on display. We'll take a stab at understanding their complex jobs that require a visionary, designer, project manager – who can dig, maintain plantings and diagnose problems. We'll let them tell us about their areas of responsibility, their challenges and successes, and what they like best about Brookside.

We hope "Brookside from the Inside" will enhance your enjoyment of the gardens by giving you a new perspective on how it all happens.

Julia Horman, co-editor

Brookside from the Inside *a look at what it takes to make it all happen*

By Julia Horman

"More than anything, I must have flowers, always, always." That quote from the French Impressionist, Claude Monet, surely resonates with us, the friends of Brookside Gardens. The creators of Brookside anticipated our yearning for flowers and built us a conservatory during the initial construction phase of the gardens. The North House was opened to the public in 1969. At that time, the South House was used for propagating plants for future display in the North House and Formal Gardens.

Our desire to grow and enjoy plants out of season has a long history – the Romans are said to have used mica to protect vegetable seedlings. As early as the 16th century, orangeries and conservatories were used for winter protection of the tender species that plant explorers were sending back to Europe. Today these structures allow the gardener to control time and weather, leap-frog seasons, and transport visitors to far-away places. Gar-



dening under glass is a challenge that requires special focus and skill. At Brookside, Horticulturist Kathy Stevens, has met that challenge – the Conservatory has been thriving under her management since 2004.

Kathy is an area native, born in Washington, DC, and raised in Bethesda. She describes an early childhood interest in the plants that grew in her backyard, recalling a fascination with the growth cycle of dogwood, from bud, to flower, to berry, to seed. Her favorite plant was wild garlic which she would protect with little stick fences. By the time Kathy was in her first year of college at Cornell in upstate New York, she realized that her childhood interest in plants was broadening - she had a desire to understand the processes of life around us. Kathy spent her college years refining her interests and testing future career possibilities. She started in Humanities, quickly



transferred to Biology and then to Plant Sciences. Each move gave her new insights and new ideas for the future. From a summer job at USDA, Kathy learned that she liked watering plants in the greenhouse better than studying fruit flies in the lab. She dreamed of being a farmer and attempted to take every relevant class in the AG College at Cornell. She gained a lot of 'book' knowledge on her way to a BS in Plant Sciences, but graduated with minimal practical experience.

After Cornell, Kathy concentrated on filling the practical gap with internships at several farms. In Virginia, she worked on a farm that specialized in growing herbs for the wholesale and restaurant trade; in Ithaca, New York, it was a 'pick-your-own' fruit tree farm. Kathy also worked for a woman who raised strawberries, flowers for cutting and herbs. On the farms, Kathy was gaining the how-to knowledge she needed: hands-on experience with a broad array of plants, cultivation techniques, growing crops in the field and in the greenhouse, harvesting, pest and weed control, picking vegetables, herbs, flowers and Japanese beetles.

Although Kathy was having a great time on the farms and loved all the action outdoors, her student loans were looming – it was time to abandon



internships and find a real job. She had begun working for a garden center in Maryland when her mother saw a want ad for a grower position at Brookside Gardens. Kathy applied and was hired in 1994. For the next several years, she remained in a flexible mode, learning, testing. Kathy worked for Joe Kraut at the Fritz for a year and learned more about production. She left Brookside to try farming with some friends; this time she learned how much capital was needed for a successful farm operation. Another year passed; Kathy was back with M-NCPPC working at Pope Farm when a gardener position opened up at Brookside. Kathy was re-hired as a Gardener 3 with responsibility for the Fragrance and

Formal Gardens. Moving into a position where there was more opportunity for interaction with the public seemed to round out Kathy's varied interests. She settled in, and after seven years in Brookside's outdoor gardens, Kathy was promoted to a Horticulturist 2 position and assumed management responsibility for the Conservatory.

Brookside's Conservatory was a new world for Kathy, very different from the outdoor gardening world she knew so well. She lists for us some of the challenges she faced: an artificial environment with no direct sun, very hot in the summer, hard to heat in the winter; relatively small planting beds that required new design techniques; cultivation of tropical and sub-tropical plants; the expectation of continuous bloom in a garden that's never dormant, has no off-season.



Although her move to the Conservatory was a somewhat daunting change, Kathy says it was a very exciting opportunity for her. She quickly adjusted to spring in January; she enjoyed finding plants that normally bloom when days are short or those that could be tricked into winter bloom. Kathy learned to adjust her designs for the conservatory's small beds. She could see that, in the smaller planting spaces, a lot of variety reads as interesting rather than chaotic. She enjoyed ramping up her color schemes as a foil for the extensive stonework. As her expertise increased, Kathy started to think about ways to improve the displays and enhance the visitors' experience.

Kathy is proud of the many improvements that have been made in recent years. There have been hard-scape renovations of the waterfall and stream bed in the North House; and of walkways and bed borders throughout the conservatory. Kathy noted that the installation of



bio-filters greatly reduced the amount of staff time needed to maintain an appealing waterscape. Although the on-going improvements are aimed at ensuring visitors' safety and pleasure, Kathy and I agree that little kids may miss the fun of playing with the gravel that used to border the planting beds.

To many Brookside visitors, "Wings of Fancy" has become the Conservatory's signature show. It's an



exhibit that has continued to improve each year since it was introduced in 1997. It's no surprise to hear Kathy say that the five and a half month butterfly show is the Conservatory team's greatest

challenge. She commends career staff members, Cheryl Beagle and Lisa Sutherby, and year-round seasonal, Meryl Moran, for their consistent support and hard work. Kathy also notes that "Wings of Fancy" is supported by four or five seasonal staff and up to 300 volunteers. She says that the volunteers are great; they are a critical link in the effective operation of the Conservatory and its special exhibits.

In order to get the butterfly exhibit up and keep it running smoothly, Kathy and staff have become coordination experts, working with BG growers, butterfly suppliers, USDA, Park's Maintenance Department, BG's Children's Education and Volunteer Office, hiring and training new seasonals and volunteers. Preparation and planning work for "Wings of Fancy" goes on all year. There is a heavy focus on new ideas, making sure proposed changes are tested and implemented before the show opens.



During its run, time for anything other than day-to-day operation of "Wings of Fancy" is minimal, but Kathy manages to keep in touch with the growers working up at the Fritz. Shari Adams grows the plants for the Mum Show, which comes in after the

butterflies exit. Xiao Qi Yu is the grower for the winter and spring shows and Bert Zeitler grows for summer and the butterflies. At the end of each show, the growers and Conservatory staff meet to discuss plant successes and problems, and to plan for the future. The combined team is always looking for new plant ideas and enhancements for the Conservatory displays. Kathy mentioned that with the butterfly exhibit suspended for 2014, she and her staff will have the one thing they never seem to have enough of – time. They intend to work on upgrading training and interpretation materials and hope to visit other conservatories and butterfly shows in their never-ending search for new ideas.

Throughout our conversation, Kathy's focus rarely strayed from the visitor. For her, working in a public garden means choosing plants and designing spaces that will elicit positive responses. She enjoys seeing the first-timers who have just discovered Brookside, and hearing them exclaim over the permanent specimens - the banana tree, the powder puff tree and the bird of paradise. If she has a chance, she'll point out the cycad in the North House and share its story. Cycads are known as "living fossils"; BG's plant may be 200 years old. It's said to have been grown at the Botanic Gardens from seed that could have been donated by a relative of Captain Cook.



Kathy delights in talking to visitors who have travelled broadly, or have lived in other climates throughout the world. The plants in Brookside's Conservatory speak of a global nature and of explorers in search of beauty or food who moved plants around the world. The Conservatory plants can be reminders of life in El Salvador, a honeymoon in Hawaii, a grandma in Florida; they can stimulate conversation and great stories. Kathy says that she and her staff enjoy the enthusiasm of the visitors and love sharing the Conservatory with them.

Toward the end of our conversation, Kathy spoke of missing outdoor gardens and woody plants, saying she makes a point of keeping up with what's going on outside. She regularly visits a favorite, secluded spot in the Azalea Garden which has outward views toward the Aquatic Garden. Kathy encourages us to visit Brookside in all seasons so that we may enjoy the cycles of nature. She also suggests visiting on a cloudy day when the beautiful garden will feel like it's ours. While she was on the subject of outside gardens, Kathy talked about her theory that "leaves

are misunderstood." She urges homeowners to use their leaves to improve the soil, rather than put them at the curb for pick-up; and she reminds us to water our gardens.

Kathy's final message is for Friends of Brookside. She says, "We love you. Thanks for responding to what we say we need – and thanks for providing money for plants."

In this and future issues of *The Brooksider*, we will provide a listing of upcoming FOBG sponsored events and Brookside Gardens adult programs. The list will be updated as information becomes available. We hope this will be helpful in planning how you can take advantage of all that Brookside Gardens has to offer. Additional offerings, such as children's programs, art exhibits and excursions are available in the [Experience](#) program guide.

FOBG Sponsored Events

	Date	ParkPASS #
Orchid Show & Sale @ Behnke Nurseries, Bladensburg	03/15/14	-----
Orchid Show & Sale @ Behnke Nurseries, Bladensburg	03/16/14	-----
Fall Plant Sale @ Beech Hill maintenance area	09/13/14	-----

Brookside Gardens Adult Programs

	Date	ParkPASS #
Spring Forward Conservatory Tour	02/21/14	248556
Green Matters Symposium	02/28/14	248349
Philadelphia Flower Show	03/04/14	245851
Philadelphia Flower Show	03/06/14	245852
We Say Potatoes	03/12/14	272649
Botanical Painting: A Beautiful Leaf *	03/14/14	271199
How to Make a Home Worm Bin	03/18/14	272499
Painting 205: Botanical Painting *	03/25/14	275050
Local Gardening 101	03/27/14	272549
A Pansy: Wet & Dry Colored Pencil	03/29/14	271249
Rain Garden Workshop **	04/03/14	272199
Local Gardening 201	04/03/14	272550
Hardy Ferns & Allies: It's Easy Being Green	04/10/14	240549
Painting Studio: Advanced	04/12/14	271299

Spring Shoots & Seeds	04/06/14	272650
Brookside Gardens Walk **	04/19/14	270649
It's Spring and the Wildflowers are up!	04/22/14	270550
Painting Studio: Beginner-intermediate **	04/25/14	271301
Make & Take Rain Barrels **	04/25/14	272229
Botany for Artists	04/29/14	275051
Historic Gardens of Downtown Fredericksburg	04/29/14	272149
The Fragrance Garden	04/30/14	270551
Nature Journal: Spring Ephemerals *	05/01/14	271351
McCrillis Gardens Walk **	05/04/14	270653
Not-to-miss Garden Centers	05/06/14	272150
Hanging Baskets **	05/07/14	272399
Painting Roses (Look & Learn)	05/10/14	271449
Sensational Strawberries	05/14/14	272651
Conservation Landscaping Techniques **	05/15/14	272350
Private Gardens of Montgomery County	05/17/14	272152
Miniature Hostas **	05/21/14	272401
Sketch Trees in the Garden *	05/29/14	271601
Don't Forget the Groundcovers!	06/04/14	270552
Gardens of the Capital	06/10/14	272151
Best of Brookside **	06/12/14	272403
Zen Garden	06/17/14	272405
Summer Salads	06/18/14	272652
A Visit to Oatlands	06/24/14	272153
The New Gude Garden	06/26/14	270599
Photographing Flowers Artistically	06/28/14	272449
Start Drawing and Painting	07/08/14	271649
Dealing with Deer	07/10/14	270600
Truly Tomatoes	07/16/14	272653
Low Tunnel Construction Demonstration	07/19/14	272599
An Introduction to Water Gardening	07/30/14	270601

* Multiple meeting times for this course

** Multiple course times available

***For additional programs, more information and fees,
see the [Xperience](#) program guide or click this link for [ParkPass.org](#).***



Suggestions? Ideas? Let us know!

Friends of Brookside Gardens, Inc. Board of Directors

1800 Glenallan Avenue, Wheaton, MD 20902

301-962-1435 (voice mail checked daily)

Email address: friendsofbrooksidegardens@yahoo.com

Web address: <http://www.bgfriends.org/>

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