



GREATER PHILADELPHIA AREA DOCENT CONSORTIUM

GPADC Spring Meeting

Via Zoom

18 May 2021

Welcome

GPADC Opening Remarks. GPADC Chair Anna Hadgis welcomed all participants to the GPADC Spring Meeting, presented in conjunction with The Jenkins Arboretum and Gardens.

Anna began by introducing past GPADC Chairs Barbara Moll, Bonnie Brown, Ellen Semple and Janet Krevenas. She then introduced the current Steering Committee members: Vice Chair Maria Colella, Treasurer Judy Zipkin-Grasso, Secretary Rebecca Butterfield, and Members-at-Large VJ Jackson, Michael Rieder, Bill Linhart and Linda Markoff.

Anna introduced our speaker, Stephanie Kuniholm, Director of External Relations at Jenkins Arboretum.

Program

Jenkins Arboretum and Gardens Opening Remarks. Stephanie thanked the GPADC for this opportunity and regretted that we could not walk through the gardens. Stephanie has spent most of her life in the Philadelphia area and has worked at the Tyler Arboretum, the Morris Arboretum and elsewhere. As Director of External Relations, Stephanie oversees fundraising, marketing and public programs. She gave us an overview of Jenkins' present, past, people, plants and programs before leading us on a virtual tour of the gardens through all the seasons.

Present

The Jenkins Arboretum and Gardens is located in Devon, near King of Prussia, and comprises 48 acres. 15 acres are open to the public as gardens, the remainder are protected areas. They have various types of gardens, but they focus largely on azaleas and rhododendrons. Jenkins averages 70,000 visitors per year. They have seen an increase in visitors in the age of COVID. It is open 365 days a year (except during extreme or dangerous weather conditions) and they are free.

Past

The Jenkins was founded by Laurence and Elizabeth Jenkins and opened in 1976. Upon their marriage, Elizabeth Jenkins' father gifted them the house and 20 acres of land. Mrs. Jenkins, an

avid gardener and nature lover, bequeathed her property as an arboretum. Inspired by this example, Louisa Browning, a neighbor of the Jenkins, left her house and 26 acres to the arboretum upon her death. Two additional acres were subsequently purchased.

The first trustees hired designer George Patton and he decided to focus on azaleas and rhododendron as native to this area. Working with Director Leonard Sweetman, Patton dug a pond, added trails and a visitor center. The new visitor center, opened in 2009, is an example of sustainable design. It also incorporates the original design center building.

People

In addition to five full-time staff, the Jenkins has a large contingent of seasonal, part-time and volunteer staff. Volunteers serve as greeters, garden crews and greenhouse crews. They also have two Hamilton Fellowships for university students and Internships for High School Students.

Plants

There is a Curator for the plant collection: each tree and shrub is accessioned and a record kept of its names, plot number and date. Detailed records are important because the Jenkins is part of a global conservation program to protect species via genetic banks.

The bulk of their plant collection consists of azaleas, rhododendron and mountain laurel, all native species. They work closely with hybridizers. They also focus on plants of the eastern United States, many of which are rare or endangered. In this way, the Jenkins functions as a repository for future restoration.

Programs

The Jenkins' goal is to connect people with plants. They lead tours throughout the year. During the pandemic, they did more virtual tours. They expect to provide in person tours again this July. Currently, they host a virtual event every third Thursday. They provide a variety of workshops on topics such as pruning, floral design and bulb planting. These workshops continued to be held during the pandemic—outside and masked. There are special programs for children, such as sidewalk chalk art, story time and nature walks. Community programs include their popular winter luminary walk, with pathways lined with 3,000 lights.

Jenkins through the Seasons: A Virtual Walk

Winter is a quiet time at Jenkins. The focus is more contemplative and architectural. The gardens are always open unless they need to close for snow removal. In March, some rhododendrons begin to open, providing the first color of the year. Next come the native ephemeral wildflowers. These are delicate and subtle blooms like the Virginia bluebells. Skunk cabbage, by the stream's banks, can melt the snow around it to give pollinators access.

Spring brings the azaleas and rhododendron to full bloom. The primary garden colors are pinks and purples. There are many places to sit within the gardens, providing opportunities for rest and contemplation. Gardeners are busy cleaning up and getting things ready for the summer. In the conservation areas, volunteers work on removing invasive species. *Plein air* artists are frequent visitors.

Summer is wildflower season with many native varieties, including hibiscus, lotus and orchids. The many pollinators and birds are highly active now. The predominant colors are yellow, orange and green. It is also a time to battle the over abundance of lily pads in the pond.

Fall begins early as the leaves start to change color in August. Like Spring, Fall is a peak time for visitors. Birds are gorging themselves on the berries. The volunteers construct a giant wreath.

Note: The presentation was accompanied by stunning photographs of Jenkins' natural beauty in each season.

Stephanie ended by inviting everyone to come and experience Jenkins in person—and to stop by to say hello to her when we did.

Questions and Answers

Stephanie happily fielded questions from the audience. Here are her responses:

- Jenkins has worked with many universities from around the country. They have two Fellow every year . They also have 2-4 High School Interns each year, depending on funding availability. Often those interns are from Conestoga or Shipley and the positions are for seniors.
- They have a deer exclusion fence around most of the property. Each plant that they sell to the public has an information card that includes notes on its resistance to deer.
- The term horticulturalist implies more formal, professional training than the term gardener. That is how the two positions are distinguished at Jenkins. However, other institutions often use the terms interchangeably.
- There are numerous varieties of azaleas that are native to this region. Many growers are hybridizing them to enhance scent or to create new colors. Stephanie is currently excited about a new program to hybridize native deciduous azaleas.
- The Jenkins does not keep a seed bank. They preserve species by growing the plants. As they age, they take cutting and regrow them.
- They have not been overrun by the Spotted Lantern Fly. They do have a pest management group that works with them to control damaging pests.
- Jenkins does not offer consulting services. However, they can refer people to the arborists with whom Jenkins works or put them in touch with the local Master Gardeners group.

- Because their tours are outdoors, they can easily be adapted for groups of various sizes. Many of their trails are rather narrow. A group of forty would be divided into smaller groups.
- The Third Thursday programs are all done through Eventbrite. One may register on Jenkins' site or on Eventbrite. They are free to everyone.
- They have three beehives located outside public access areas
- The only pests/disease they could not manage was the Chestnut Blight. It killed all the chestnut trees and significantly changed the gardens. Now they have an oak canopy. Since then, they have had other infestations, but nothing that changed the gardens to the same extent.
- The plants they sell range in size from 2 inches to several feet. Fall as well as spring is a good time for planting.
- A recent storm took out 90 trees around the pond, allowing more sunlight in this area. They are taking advantage of this and planting more hybridized azaleas there.
- She does not know what we should anticipate regarding cicadas.
- The visitor center includes exhibition space and they regularly do shows there. In addition to works by the *plein air* artists, they have also mounted exhibitions of pottery, quilts, jewelry and flower arrangements. They are currently partnering with three botanical artists on a project that will showcase 36 plants from the Jenkins collection.

Concluding Remarks

Anna Hadgis thanked Stephanie for her fascinating presentation. She warmly welcomed Jenkins Arboretum and Gardens as a new member of GPADC.

Anna said she is proud of all GPADC members and how they have pivoted during these challenging times. She noted that GPADC will have an in person program this fall and will host Crossroads at the Penn Museum in April 2022.

Anna asked that everyone continue to support GPADC as GPADC supports them. One can always go to the GPADC website and access any of the member institutions. She noted that the GPADC Steering Committee members were all great communicators and masters of technology. Ellen Semple added that the Delaware Art Museum docents have twice done programs with educators at other museums and GPADC could be a resource if others would like to do something similar. Judy Zipkin-Grasso said the Michener is doing virtual tours and could possibly do programs for other organizations. Anna reminded everyone that the Steering Committee has nine members from eight institutions and invited all to contact us.

Treasurer Judy Zipkin-Grasso will be sending the annual dues notice within a month. Payment is due in September.

Best wishes were given to Vernoca L. Michael, the retiring Executive Director of the Paul Robeson House & Museum. A warm welcome was extended to her successor, Janice Sykes-

Ross. Janice is excited to take on Vernoca's mantle. She told us they are reopening to the public on June 25 and invited all to see their new exhibition, *Paul Robeson: His Music, His Movies, His Message*.

Meeting Adjourned 11:30 am

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Butterfield, Recording Secretary