



# THE CONSERVATORY NEWS

Spring 2010

## IS OUR VOLUNTEER PARK CONSERVATORY AN ENDANGERED SPECIES?

Might Seattle City budget shortages force our beloved Conservatory to close? We hope not. But it would be naïve to ignore the widespread impact of municipal belt tightening. One needn't look too far. The Vancouver B.C. Parks Board recently voted 4-3 to close the Bloedel Conservatory in Queen Elizabeth Park.

That closure leaves just a handful of public conservatories on the west coast. Our Conservatory is just as vulnerable to this uncertain future.

It is a particularly harsh reality that so many city parks and facilities face program cuts and closures just when families most need inexpensive and educational activities close to home.

We aren't standing around waiting for the axe to fall. We have had wonderful support in the past from City Council member Tom Rasmussen. Recently we had a chance to welcome the new chair of the Parks Committee, Council member Sally Bagshaw. We would like to extend an invitation

to all of our Council members and our new Mayor Mike McGinn to come and tour our beautiful greenhouse. As you well know, to know the Conservatory is to love it. We want everyone to see firsthand why we treasure the Conservatory, the historic buildings, the glorious plant collections, and our dedicated volunteer group.

In less than two years the Volunteer Park Conservatory celebrates its 100-year anniversary. This centennial has special significance,



PHOTO: J. Langerud

not only to horticulturists but also to historians, educators, and those interested in architecture/preservation issues. For 100 years

the Conservatory, as conceived by the Olmsted brothers, has sat high on Capitol Hill weathering many a storm, including economic ones.

Yet the Conservatory survives and prospers as one of Seattle's crown jewels. Past City governments, the people of Seattle, the Conservatory gardeners, and countless volunteers have committed their time, energy, financial support, and their hearts to preserve and support this irreplaceable Seattle icon. Three of the five "houses" have been

rebuilt to historical standards.

There's more work to be done so that our treasured Conservatory can emerge reinvigorated into its next century. We will continue to advocate for the Conservatory's legacy, but we need your help, especially now. Please join us for our Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 27th 6:30 p.m.

at the Shafer Baillie Mansion – 907 14th Ave E (at Aloha).

# IN AND AROUND THE CONSERVATORY



PHOTO: Leonard Johnson

## SPOTLIGHT ON LONGTIME GARDENER GISELLE BLYTHE!

To paraphrase a recent visitor's comment, "Today I visited China, South Africa, Chile, Arizona, Costa Rica and Mexico without ever leaving town." I

love that my job allows me to do this every day. As I work in the different houses of the Conservatory, I am transported to those far countries, thinking about how these plants would be growing in their native habitat.

My journey here was a long and winding one. As a child I was always playing in the garden alongside my mother; she and my aunt were avid members of an Arboretum Unit and the American Rock Garden Society. A very early memory is of going to our friend Carl English's home one evening to see a special flower. All I remember is a whole lot of people traipsing in the dark down through the woody garden to the greenhouse to behold this wondrous flower, Queen of the Night!

As an adult, after dabbling in dental assisting, retail, bookkeeping and real estate I decided to give it all up and become a full-time studio fiber artist. After a few years of isolation in my studio, I looked for volunteer work at Woodland Park Zoo, thinking it would be fun to work with the animals. They told me there was nothing available there except in the Horticulture department, so I decided to give that a try. This was during the ambitious 10-year bond issue that essentially rebuilt the entire zoo, transforming it from depressing cage

exhibits to what it is today- a world-class zoo. Soon I was hired to work full time/temporary as a gardener and I became focused on the interior exhibits – Tropical Rainforest, Day House and Tropical Asia. In 1998 a permanent position opened up at the Conservatory and I landed it!

I am still an artist as much as I am a gardener, and I use all those skills here every day, composing works of art with plants instead of fabrics and beads. I look forward to celebrating our 100th Anniversary in 2012!

Giselle Blythe

## GIFT SHOP NEWS RESOURCE CENTER GETS A MICROSCOPE!

The latest item to arrive in our gift shop/resource center is not for purchase, but for viewing! Two FOC members recently donated a microscope that is receiving rave reviews from visitors! Specimens can be viewed from 10 to 30 times there actual size. We have several cards with specimens on them. Stop by and check out a close up view of the bright, shiny seeds

from a vanilla bean, hairs and seeds on a tillandsia, or the spores on ferns.

We thank these

generous members for adding to our visitor's experience.

*A heartfelt thanks to Lyn Sauter & Giselle Blythe for their donation of a microscope for the Resource Center.*

## WHAT IS IN BLOOM:

Here's what will be blooming in the Conservatory during April, May & June:

Blooming cacti & orchid cacti, fuchsias, hydrangeas, coffee trees, fishtail palm flowers and fruit, astilbe, Michelia figo - Banana Shrub, begonias, gesneriads, Monstera deliciosa fruit, tulips (April) and heuchera.

In July we'll begin having Brugmansia - Angels Trumpets, canna, Tibouchina urvilleana - Princess flower, coleus, Dancing ladies ginger, Clerodendrums.

IN THE END,  
OUR SOCIETY WILL  
BE DEFINED  
NOT ONLY BY  
WHAT WE CREATE  
BUT BY  
WHAT WE REFUSE  
TO DESTROY.

-John Sawhill

WHOEVER LOVES AND UNDERSTANDS A GARDEN WILL FIND CONTENTMENT WITHIN.

- Chinese Proverb

## SPRING PLANT SALE

Just in time for Mothers Day! The FOC Spring Plant Sale happens on **Saturday, May 8**, 10 am to 3 pm. Join us on the lawn across from the Conservatory to purchase orchids, cacti, bromeliads and many other unique indoor plants like those seen in the Conservatory. Check out our information booth for expert advice!

You'll need containers for those new plants! All containers in the Gift Shop will be **20% off** the day of sale!

## PLANT SALE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Do you have some time to help? Shifts begin at 7:00 a.m. to set up, 10:00 for sale, and 2:00 to begin take-down. We also need drivers with pick up trucks to transport plants, tables and tents.

Please call 206-322-4112.

foc@volunteerparkconservatory.org

SHOP LOCAL – SHOP GREEN SUPPORT THE CONSERVATORY!

## ANNUAL MEETING

FOC members are invited to our Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 27th at 6:30 pm at the Shafer-Baillie Mansion, 907 14th Ave. East on Capitol Hill. Join us for great food and entertainment, and find out what the Friends of the Conservatory Board is up to!



PHOTO: sbmansion.com

## Join the Friends of the Conservatory!

Your membership in the Friends helps to support the Conservatory and its programs. Join us!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

### Method of payment:

Check enclosed (payable to FOC)  Visa  MasterCard

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. date \_\_\_\_\_

New Member

Renewal

\$40 Individual

\$25 Senior/Student

\$50 Supporting

\$100 Sustaining

\$500 Patron

\$1000 Conservator

Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: FOC, 1402 E. Galer St., Seattle, WA 98112



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Seattle, WA 98112  
[www.volunteerparkconservatory.org](http://www.volunteerparkconservatory.org)

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# CALENDAR

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Apr 1</b>             | <b>First Thursday:</b> Docents available in Conservatory 11 am - 3 p.m    |
| <b>Apr 3</b>             | <b>First Saturday:</b> Docents available in Conservatory 11 am - 3 p.m.   |
| <b>Apr 3, 10, 17, 24</b> | <b>Plant Talk: Ant Plants</b> Short talk in Conservatory 1 p.m.           |
| <b>Apr 27</b>            | <b>FOC Annual Meeting:</b> Shafer Baillie Mansion 6:30 pm <b>(page 3)</b> |
| <b>May 1</b>             | <b>First Saturday:</b> Docents available in Conservatory 11 am - 3 p.m.   |
| <b>May 6</b>             | <b>First Thursday:</b> Docents available in Conservatory 11 am - 3 p.m.   |
| <b>May 8</b>             | <b>Spring Plant Sale:</b> Volunteers Needed! <b>(page 3)</b>              |
| <b>May 1, 15, 22, 29</b> | <b>Plant Talk: Ant Plants</b> Short talk in Conservatory 1 p.m.           |

