



# Potomac Valley Chapter

## American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Newsletter: March 2010

### Calendar

- \* **March 28, 2010** – Regular Meeting, National Arboretum
- \* **April 24, 2010** – Flower Show, National Arboretum
- \* **May 14 - 17, 2010** – ARS Convention, Long Island, NY
- \* **May 18-25, 2010** – International Rhododendron Conference, Germany
- \* **June 4-6, 2010** – Sandwich Club, Cape Cod, Mass
- \* **June 19, 2010** – District 9 Luncheon, Maggiano's Italian Restaurant, Tyson's Corner, VA
- \* **July 18, 2010** – Chapter Picnic, Seneca Creek State Park

### Chapter Officers

**President:** Bob McWhorter  
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**Vice-President:** Richard Mohr  
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**Treasurer:** Phyllis Rittman  
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**Our Next meeting: March 28, 2010**

**Tom Ahern**

**“Rhododendron and Azalea Gardens of the Eastern Atlantic States”**

**Location: National Arboretum**

**Time: 1:00 – 4:00 PM**

After such a snowy winter, we know all of you will want to come our next meeting at the National Arboretum to see the wonderful presentation that Tom Ahern of Pennsylvania has prepared for us. Tom is a noted rhododendron hybridizer in our eastern region, but he has been interested in gardens and gardening of all kinds for many years.

Looking for landscape ideas? Even though Tom Ahern's main interest is in rhododendrons, he will show us the creativity in both planting and garden accents. His talk will include both public and private gardens that he has photographed over the years including the Huber Garden shown to the right. He will conclude with some excerpts from his program “Rhododendrons of the Pennsylvania Dutch Country” where you will see some of the results from 20 years of hybridizing by Tom and fellow hybridizer John Doppel. Tom started by trying to create hardy yellow and orange blossoms but then shifted his efforts to come up with plants with unusual looking foliage. Some of his slower growing small leaved plants are suitable for use in rock gardens. John Doppel has also been working on oranges, yellows, bi-colors and blotches.

Tom Ahern and his wife Barbara moved to their home in Bethlehem, PA, in 1984. Tom brought some of his roses that he had been



*Bob and Helene Huber Garden in Salford Township, PA*

growing at their former home and found that they didn't grow too well on the shaded northern slope of a mountain. In 1986, Tom attended a meeting of the newly formed Lehigh Valley Chapter of the ARS and soon developed an intense interest in rhododendrons. Tom started hybridizing them in 1989 and the rest is history. You will be amazed at the wonderful new hybrids he has created.

Tom is a former Lehigh Valley Chapter president and bronze medal recipient. He was also a member of the 2004 King of Prussia convention committee and was in charge of the plant sale.

**Refreshment Duty:** Persons whose last names begin with **Q** through **Z** are asked to bring some refreshment goodies for the table.

**Directions:** The National Arboretum is located in northeast Washington, D.C., off of Bladensburg Road at 24th and R St. The Arboretum website provides directions: [www.usna.usda.gov](http://www.usna.usda.gov)

## **The Annual Flower Show: April 24, 2010**

The Potomac Valley Chapter will be hosting host our Annual Flower Show at the National Arboretum during the FONA Garden Fair (plant sale) on Saturday, April 24. This will likely be our last event held at the Arboretum for quite some time since the Administration building will be undergoing extensive renovations and will not be available for at least 2 years. Because of the FONA sale, we are expecting increased crowds but it also will cause some logistical problems.

We intend to set up on Friday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> and we encourage people to bring in their flowers at that time. People can deliver flowers on Saturday, but they will only be able to drive up to the auditorium, stop for 5 minutes to unload flowers, but then will have to park cars and return by shuttle bus. Those will be running all day long.

The Saturday volunteers must arrive at the Arboretum between 7:30 and 8:00 AM and check in with security. There will be no parking near the auditorium on Saturday and many lots are expected to be full by 9:00 AM.

We will need volunteers to assist on Friday and Saturday both, so please think about helping us out. We will also have short educational programs staged every hour all day long. This will be a great opportunity to meet other plant people, recruit a few new members, and maybe even buy some plants. Please help out! We need you!

## **Plant Trekkers: Another Successful Trip**

We want to thank Joe Marsala for organizing another great trip to nurseries in Virginia and North Carolina from March 5 to 7. The weather was great and the nurseries had many choice plants for sale. As is always the case, most of us returned home with full cars and empty wallets. At least the Potomac Valley Chapter has done its best to stimulate the economy.

## **The Sandwich Club: June 4 – 6, 2010**

The Sandwich Club will meet a week later than usual this year but since this year is tending towards a late spring, we are expecting a great display. Norman Beaudry and John Delano are still working on details but plans for this year include some of familiar favorites including the

beautiful rhododendrons at Heritage Plantation, a picnic at the Gingras garden, a tour of Bob Furman's garden, and other details to be determined. We intend to be staying at the Earl of Sandwich Motel: 378 Route 6a, East Sandwich, MA 02537 (508) 888-1415.

Due to the busy spring with the ARS Convention on Long Island and the International Rhododendron Conference in Germany, your editor is not sure he will be able to get another newsletter out prior to the Sandwich Club trip to Cape Cod. If you are interested in going, please let Norman Beaudry know so he can send you additional details: [beaunorm@verizon.net](mailto:beaunorm@verizon.net)

## **Honoring the Legacy**

### **District Luncheon: June 19, 2010**

Please mark your calendars for June 19, 2010. We are planning a District 9 Luncheon that Saturday from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM at Maggiano's Italian Restaurant at Tyson's Corner.

We want to take time to honor the legacies of some people in our District including two great ladies in our chapter who passed away recently, Jane Goodrich and Margaret White. We will also have two speakers, one of which will be Don Hyatt giving a version of his talk the "Legacy of Joe Gable" that he prepared for the Fall Regional.

Details and registration forms will be sent to all members in District 9 later but we want you to save the date for us so you can help us celebrate the memories of these and other ARS members who have made such a difference in our society.

## **Say a Little Prayer**

Some of you may already know that Bob McWhorter's daughter, Jennifer Marie, is undergoing aggressive treatment at Johns Hopkins for melanoma cancer in her lung. Rosa is taking care of Jennifer's house and her three young children while Jen's husband is by her side at the hospital. Bob is commuting back and forth to Eastern Shore every day, taking care of their own pets and house in Gambrells and then relieving Rosa when he can. Richard Mohr has taken over the helm for our chapter, but please keep the McWhorters in your thoughts and prayers.

## Snowmageddon by Don Hyatt

The record-breaking 24 inches of snow in December was more than enough for any winter season. That mess was just about gone but then came February. In four storms over a period of 10 days, I recorded 54 inches of snow in my yard. I know some people got less snow and others more but this winter was one for the records.

After the first two storms that each dropped 6 inches of snow, the next storm was the monster. It dropped 26 inches of heavy wet snow on my garden and flattened everything. We referred to it as “Snowpocalypse” and “Snowbliteration” but finally settled on “Snowmageddon.”

Of course, Mother Nature was not through. A few days later came “Snowmageddon 2.0” with another 14 more inches of snow, 50 mph winds with temps at 17?, and drifting. Finding a place to put the stuff was the most difficult. I eventually piled snow 10 ft deep (Matterhorn) on top a 3-ft ‘My Mary’ as other the plants were irreplaceable.

Now that the snow is beginning to melt, I can begin to assess the damage. Most of my rhododendrons fared better than the azaleas. Some large plants were bent over to the ground but they are now springing back with just a few broken branches. Evergreen azaleas have taken the hardest hit. I see many broken branches and in some cases, entire plants are broken off. I do expect most to survive.

Repairing broken branches is not easy. Plants that have only cracked limbs might be able to be salvaged by tying them up and wrapping the wound with tape as though making a graft. Norman and Jean Beaudry are trying to repair a number of large weeping maples by using bolts to pull branches together and wrapping the wound.



*The “Matterhorn” – Don’s Snow Pile Sitting on Top of ‘My Mary’*



*Snowmageddon 2.0 - Drifts on Don Hyatt’s driveway*

If the branch is severely broken, I intend to just cut it off and do some other heavy pruning while the plants are still dormant. Then I’ll wait for the plant to send out new growth this spring and will do some modest pinching this summer to encourage branching. I will gradually try to even up some of the plants over a period of years since it is not wise to remove more than 1/3 of an azalea’s branch structure in any one year. In time, the damaged plants will recover but until then, I will have lots of “artistic” plants in my garden

## Photography Contest Winners:

Congratulations to the winners of our annual Photography Contest as pictured on the color insert with this newsletter. Best in Show went to Dan Neckel for his lovely picture of reflections at Asticou Azalea Garden that he photographed in near Acadia National Park in Maine. He and his wife Joanne extended their trip to Maine after the Sandwich Club. Looks like a great place to visit!

Another winner from the Sandwich Club outing was Jon Wallenmeyer’s picture of the monkey puzzle tree against pink rhododendrons at the Polly Hill Arboretum. Wonderful design!

Other top vote getters include Carolyn Beck’s photo of RBS 136, one of Bob Stewart’s lovely bicolor azalea hybrids that has not yet been named. Bob McWhorter’s photograph of the bicolor azalea ‘Pete’ also won a first prize as did Don Hyatt’s photo *R. periclymenoides* and a bumblebee taken along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

As in the past, all who entered left with a prize of some kind. Congratulations photographers! Be sure to take pictures this year so you have something to enter in next year’s contest.

## Rooting Dormant Cuttings

by Don Hyatt

If your azaleas and rhododendrons were not severely damaged by the heavy snows this winter, you were lucky. If you did lose branches, don't throw them away since you can probably root some of that tissue as dormant cuttings.



*Broken Azalea Branches – Dormant Cutting Source*

Even if the branch has become extremely desiccated, just make a fresh cut at the base, stick the end in warm water, and cover the top with a plastic bag to increase humidity. The tissue will often plump back up in a day or two and if it revives, it is often possible to root those cuttings.

For containers, anything will do. The key is to find a pot size that will fit inside a clear plastic bag so you can make a "mini-greenhouse."

I fill the containers with my standard mix: 1/2 Peat, 1/4 Sand, 1/4 Perlite. The medium should be moist but not wet since excess moisture encourages fungus diseases and rotting.

Since rhododendrons and azaleas are shallow rooted, I make short cuttings, only about 1 to 2 inches long. I also remove any flower buds since attempting to bloom will use up energy that could be put into forming new roots.

To further discourage fungus and insect pests, I usually "sterilize" the cuttings by soaking them for

5 minutes in a solution made of 1 part Clorox and 10 parts water. Afterwards, I rinse the cuttings well to remove the Clorox water and allow them to dry in the air for a few minutes.

Next, I dip the end of each cutting in a rooting hormone such as Dip 'N Grow, and insert the bottom inch into the potting medium. When the container is filled with cuttings, I enclose the pot in a plastic bag to make a mini-greenhouse which will keep humidity high while the cuttings root.

Finally, I place the pots of cuttings under fluorescent lights with "long day" conditions, 16 to 24 hours of light every day. Roots do not need light to form but new growth is encouraged with long days. Placing pots on a north window sill with good light will work too, but avoid excessive sun since bags can become easily overheated.

Cuttings should break dormancy in 4 to 8 weeks and at that time they are usually forming new roots. I watch the bags carefully to pick any out dead leaves and remove cuttings that rot. It helps keep fungal diseases at bay. There should be no need to water the pots for many months since the condensation on the bag continues to recycle moisture inside that tiny greenhouse ecosystem.

I keep containers under lights during the rest of the winter and early spring. In late spring, start opening the bags to allow cuttings to get accustomed to lower humidity for several days. Then I try to repot them into individual pots.

By early summer, I have moved the cuttings into 3-inch or 4-inch pots and have given a few doses of week fertilizer. By mid summer, plants get no more fertilizer as I want them to harden off before frost. Cold frame protection that first winter is helpful, but dormant cuttings are often large enough by fall to make it on their own.

Don't let those broken branches go to waste. If you don't need extra plants, someone else in the chapter can put them to good use.



*Dormant Cuttings from a broken branch*



*Mini-Greenhouse*



*Cuttings break dormancy, sending out new roots and shoots*

## Memories of Margaret by Don Hyatt

I guess we thought Margaret White would live forever, but sadly, on the morning of January 6, several weeks before her 104<sup>th</sup> birthday, Margaret passed away peacefully at her home. Jean Beaudry and I saw her just before Christmas and although she seemed weak, she was mentally sharp as ever.

Margaret was a strong woman and had strong convictions. She told her family that she did not want a funeral or even a memorial service when she died. However, she did not say the Potomac Valley Chapter couldn't celebrate her life. That is one motivation behind the District 9 Luncheon we have planned for June 19. It will be a chance to honor Margaret and others who have made such a difference including Jane Goodrich, too.

Gardeners will be forever indebted to Margaret for her generosity. The beautiful 13-acre estate where she and her family lived since 1939 is destined to become the John C. and Margaret K. White Horticultural Garden. Margaret actually transferred title of her estate to the Fairfax County Park Authority in 1999 but retained a life estate so she could continue to live there and enjoy the garden. Margaret had strict covenants in the deed to ensure it remained a public place devoted to plants. Now the property is under Park Authority control. The proposed Master Plan can be seen at: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/GMP/WhiteMP.pdf](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/GMP/WhiteMP.pdf)

Margaret used to say the JC was the gardener and she was only a "go-fer" but I don't believe that for a minute. JC passed away in 1978 and Margaret continued to work the garden for the next 30 years. She remembered almost every plant they bought and where it was located.



**Margaret Keister White**

*March 31, 1906 – January 6, 2010*

Margaret loved trees and said that the reason they bought the property in the first place was because of the magnificent white oak on the hill that must be centuries old. They built their home under the shade of that tree (lower left) and it continues to grace the upper garden. Sadly, their second largest oak fell during Hurricane Isabel. Interestingly, a huge willow oak in the front yard was one that Margaret and JC planted as a sapling.

Margaret told me they wanted "garden rooms" instead of flowerbeds when they designed the garden. Having traveled in the UK, they had seen mature rhododendron gardens and realized that when those plants get big, they needed open space in the foreground to appreciate their majesty.

They purchased many rhododendrons from Joe Gable including 'Cadis' which they planted at the edge of the lawn at the back of the house. I have



*The Original White Oak behind the House*



*'Cadis' Blooming in Margaret's Backyard*

seen the original 'Cadis' at Gable's Nursery and Margaret's plant is bigger, probably because the Whites didn't take as many cuttings off of their plant as Joe Gable must have done.

The Whites planted several 'David Gable' rhododendrons nearer the house and 'County of York' behind those. 'Mac Kantruss' was just around the corner on the path. Other Gable plants include several 'Caroline' specimens, a 'Hannah Hersey,' and 'Pink Twins' scattered around the perimeter of that first garden room.

A second major room in the upper garden was actually a tennis court at one time. Margaret always called it by that name. They planted Gable's 'Albert Close' on the bank above the court but the vigorous plant rambled over the edge and layered many times creating a huge specimen that measures 38 ft. across. Bordering that area are Nearing's 'Rochelle,' 'Gable's Rosebud' azaleas, and other rhododendron hybrids including 'Anna Rose Whitney.'

Nearby is 'John C. White,' one of the Goodrich hybrids of ('Vulcan' x Gable's *fortunei*) named for JC, and *R. makinoi*, 'Margaret K. White.' The original *makinoi* was raised from seed by Jack Ayers and now resides in the Reiley's garden.

and JC had hiked up to Gregory Bald many years before I even knew the place existed. Margaret always enjoyed seeing my pictures, remarking at how much larger the azaleas had become.

Margaret had a phenomenal memory and could recite dates and experiences from long ago. It was a first hand account of history. She told me he doctors warned her as a young child that she had a weak heart and she could die if she tried to over exert or play sports. She has always been active and we laughed that perhaps it was misdiagnosed.



*Rhododendron makinoi*, 'Margaret K. White'

Margaret opened her home to our Chapter picnics and board meetings. Once I remember arriving 15 minutes early to a board meeting and there was no answer at the door. I was worried that something had happened to Margaret but a few moments later she came roaring up the driveway in her black Mercedes. She had decided to pick up Jane Goodrich and got caught in traffic.

Another incident that typifies Margaret for me was the time when in her 90's she was arrested for speeding. The police radar caught her driving 35 mph in a 25 mph zone. Margaret grumbled with disgust, "That road could easily take 35!" We will miss you Margaret but thank you for the legacy!

Charitable contributions can be made in her name to the ARS of course, but also to the Friends of the White Garden, or to a fund with the Fairfax County Park Foundation, Inc., 12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 404, Fairfax, Virginia, 22035. Indicate "John and Margaret White Garden" on the memo line of your check.

**Donald W. Hyatt, Newsletter Editor**  
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*Garden Vista from the "Tennis Court"*

Margaret and JC always loved native plants and wildflowers. They tended native plants on the property and rescued others like *Kalmia latifolia* from along route 50 when it was being widened. Wildflowers are everywhere including *Trillium grandiflorum* and a magnificent bed of *Galax*.

They were particularly fond of native azaleas, and that probably dates from the time Margaret



**Carolyn Beck – *RBS 136***



**Jon Wallenmeyer – *Polly Hill Arboretum***



**Best in Contest: Dan Neckel - *Garden Reflections, Maine***

**Potomac Valley  
Chapter ARS**

**2010 Photo  
Contest  
Winners**

The photographs on this page were determined to be the favorites in our annual contest. Congratulations to Dan Neckel whose peaceful garden reflections taken on the trip to Cape Cod was judged the favorite in this year's contest.



**Bob McWhorter - *Pete***



**Don Hyatt – *R. periclymenoides***