



Vaughn L. Banting *Comprising A Life*

Vaughn Banting, a long-time member of the National Bonsai Foundation Board of Directors and an ardent supporter of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, died in New Orleans, Louisiana on October 11, 2008 after a brief illness. A garden designer and horticulturist, a war veteran and adventurer, a bonsai artist and haiku writer, a teacher and friend, he possessed an undaunted spirit that gave hope to all who knew him.

Vaughn's heritage was of the land and planting. His grandparents were wheat farmers in Saskatchewan, Canada and with his mother, father and four sisters he migrated to New Orleans, Louisiana, where the family opened a plant nursery in 1960. During his teenage years, while working in his parents' greenhouses, he discovered bonsai and began creating his

personal designs in a special plastic house of his own construction.

This family background and individual interest inspired him to enroll in a program of ornamental horticulture and landscape architecture at Louisiana State University. After three years of study he learned that he would be a candidate for the Vietnam War draft in the fall of his senior year. Before the realities of war could overshadow his zest for life, he decided to spend the summer traveling by bike from his home in Louisiana to Colorado. This adventure captured the imagination of reporters in the towns and cities through which he traveled, and was well chronicled in newspapers along the route.

After basic training he was commissioned as a Sergeant in the U.S. Army and sent to Vietnam. In his time in the lush

jungle of that country, he came to esteem the wild orchids and tropical flora of the terrain that he patrolled. Wounded in 1971, he was awarded the Purple Heart and sent behind the lines to work as a draftsman. In his off-duty hours he worked in a children's home for war orphans and became a proficient photographer.

After his discharge, he returned to Louisiana and opened a horticulture service company, *Nicholas and Banting*, with long-time friend and fellow veteran Bill Nicholas. Nicholas soon went his own way in horticulture, but the business remained incorporated under the two names. Under Vaughn's direction, it became a prominent institution specializing in the design and installation of many of New Orleans' renowned gardens.

continued on page 3



Two of Vaughn Banting's magnificent trees in a memorial evening display following his death.



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President's Letter



"The music on classical WETA is made possible by your financial support and by the National Bonsai Foundation: dedicated to sustaining the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum at the U.S.

*National Arboretum. Winter Silhouettes exhibit beginning December 6 through December 14. Information at Bonsai-nbf.org." This recent public radio announcement is the first step in our new advertising campaign to raise the visibility of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum. We thank our campaign partners, the **Friends of the National Arboretum** and **SharCon Management and Development Company**, for answering **Barbara Marshall's** challenge to match her grant to fund this campaign, and our Marketing Consultant, **Dana Faulkner**, for organizing and guiding the campaign with such perfect sensibility.*

Visitors continue to be inspired by the stunning viewing stones remaining on display in the Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion from **Jim and Alice Greaves'** splendid exhibition "Beyond Black Mountain." The original exhibit, which ran from September 4 until October 13 in the Special Exhibits Wing, literally "rocked" with a mind-bending show of some of the finest viewing stones ever collected in the rivers and deserts of North America. The exhibit highlighted the exceptional display talents of Assistant Curator **Kathleen Emerson-Dell**, and Jim Greaves' new book, *American Viewing Stones*—

Beyond Black Mountain: Colors, Patterns and Form (available in the Arboretum gift shop) conveys the gasping thrill felt by the collector when stones of this evocative power are first discovered in nature.

As 2008 comes to a close, we remember with the most sincere gratitude the contributions to the Museum and the bonsai community as a whole of two individuals who made a huge difference. **Saburo Kato**, the revered former Chairman of the Nippon Bonsai Association and an Honorary Director of NBF who passed away at the age of 93 in February 2008, arranged Japan's 1976 donation of 53 masterpiece bonsai to the American people as a Bicentennial gift and remained for the rest of his life a key guardian and supporter of the Museum that grew out of this magnificent gift. **Vaughn Banting**, a beloved American bonsai teacher and NBF Director, who passed away at the age of 61 in October 2008, not only opened our eyes to what a bald cypress bonsai should look like but also showed us grace in the face of adversity. Both will have permanent memorials at the Museum in their honor.

We are very grateful to all of you who have joined NBF during this past year, and we thank those of you who continue to support generously this National Treasure. If you have not yet sent in your membership contribution for 2008, please do this now so that you will continue to be a member of the Museum community. An envelope is enclosed for your convenience, and the 2009 Exhibits Poster/Brochure will be sent to you as a small gift of our appreciation for your support.

Thank you and very Best Wishes for this Holiday Season.

Felix

Young Choe Appointed to NBF Board

The Kusamono artist, **Young Choe**, was elected to the National Bonsai Foundation Board of Directors in September.

A volunteer in the Museum for over 11 years, she is well known for her creative companion plant displays. She traveled to Japan on three occasions to study the unique art form of Kusamono under the Japanese master artist, **Mrs. Keiko Yamane**. Ms. Choe's designs have been on exhibit in the Museum in two solo shows: *The Art of Kusamono* in July 2007 and *Spring Kusamono* during this past year.

She also studied calligraphy and brush painting in her native country of Korea and has a degree in horticulture from the University of Maryland.



Young Choe creating a moss-ball kusamono.

Vaughn L. Banting

Continued from page 1

During this same time, he continued to work on his abiding passion, bonsai. He founded with others the *Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society* and studied under John Naka and other nationally known bonsai artists. Under their influence his proficiency in the technical aspects of bonsai practice increased and his natural creative gifts for the art emerged more fully.



As a child with his sister Joy.

A noteworthy contribution to his bonsai design was the use of trees native to the forests and swamps of Southern Louisiana.



The sweetgum on Memorial display during the recent Fall Foliage exhibit.



His plastic bonsai house.

Despite a very serious motorcycle accident in 1973, the business prospered and he gained greater recognition for his bonsai work. He also became an influential mentor to a younger generation and began to teach others, not only within the region but nationally and internationally as well.

In 1992 he was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor and the prognosis for recovery was bleak. But he survived four operations, gravitated to a motor driven wheel chair, and turned his insatiable curiosity to interests other than bonsai. He transformed the area of his home garden, previously reserved for the bonsai collection, into a lovely Zen garden complete with a tea house. With more time available to him he began writing haiku and published two collections of his work, *Reflections on Life* and *Word Bridges*. The computer pro-



Inspecting an orchid in Vietnam.

vided another outlet for him and he developed his own website, *Comprising a Life* (<http://www.vlbanting.com/>).

Vaughn's contribution to the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum was very significant. He donated three important trees to the North American Collection, a red maple forest planting, *Acer rubrum* var. *Drummondii*, the sweetgum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*, and a bald cypress, *Taxodium mucronatum*. As a member of the NBF Board of Directors he gave thoughtful responses to the issues posed, wrote for the *NBF Bulletin*, most recently on haikus in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and was an active and questioning participant in Museum Symposia.



In the Atrium dedicated to him.

His friends marked his devoted service to NBF and the Museum by giving the funding needed for the Atrium of the Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion. This, Vaughn recollected, was "the greatest single honor ever bestowed upon me." NBF will honor his many gifts to the Museum in the context of the May 2009 NBF Board Meeting.

*If you really want to live,
make your dying song
too beautiful to leave*

**Vaughn L. Banting
1947–2008**

Jack Sustic returns as Museum Curator



Jack Sustic, who retired as National Bonsai & Penjing Museum Curator in 2005, has been reappointed to this position following the retirement of **Jim Hughes** in September.

Jack first came to the Museum in 1996 as an intern sponsored by the National Bonsai Foundation. When his internship was completed, he returned to his job as nursery and greenhouse manager at the Riverbanks Zoo and Botanic Garden in South Carolina. In 1998, the position of Gardener opened up at the Museum and Jack took this opportunity to return to Washington. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed Assistant Curator. In 2002, after

a brief time away from the Museum, he returned as Supervisory Curator.

During his tenure as Curator he also served as Co-Chair of the 5th World Bonsai Convention that was held in Washington D.C. in 2005. In July of that year he resigned to help his father in the running of the family farm in Lennon, Michigan.

In his earlier work at the Museum, he had the opportunity to study with **John Naka**, **Harry Hirao** and other California bonsai artists. He also apprenticed with **Saburo Kato** at Mansai-en in Japan. As now the fifth Curator in the history of the Museum, he has had the opportunity to work not only with Jim Hughes, but also the first two Curators: **Robert Drechsler** and **Warren Hill**.

During his recent hiatus from the Museum, he was elected to the NBF Board of Directors and was a member of the Executive Committee.

Notes

- **Kaz Yoneda** of California, who donated this prostate juniper to the North American Collection in 1990, died in September. A tribute to him was published in Golden State Bonsai Federation's *Golden Statements* magazine.



- The weekend of May 1–3, 2009 will be a busy one at the Museum. The NBF Annual Board Meeting will be on May 1st followed by an evening reception in the **Maria Vanzant Upper Courtyard** and the **Rose Family Lower Courtyard**. The Potomac Bonsai Association annual show will be held on all three days, along

with a special bonsai display in the **Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion**, and bonsai vendors will be selling their wares in the Meadow across from the Museum. There will also be demonstrations and workshops, and we will have more on this in the Spring *NBF Bulletin*.

- There is a new search engine on the NBF website www.bonsai-nbf.org. All aspects of the site can be searched, including past issues of the *NBF Bulletin*, so it is a very handy tool that we hope you will use frequently.
- The **2009 NBF Calendar** is now available for \$15.00 including postage and mailing. Please send orders in the enclosed envelope.



Please renew your membership now so that you will continue to receive future issues of the *NBF Bulletin*. An envelope is enclosed for your convenience. You can send either a check or credit card information (name, number, expiration date, and email address).

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*Thank you for your support
of the National Bonsai &
Penjing Museum.*

- *Eternal Rhythms: Seasons and Time*, a thematic display of North American viewing stones from the James and Alice Greaves Collection, will be on view in the **Melba Tucker Gallery of the Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion** until June 17, 2009.



"Nestingbird and Budding Branches" two of the Greaves' Stones in the exhibit.