



Dr. Thomas S. Elias Retires as Arboretum Director

Dr. Thomas S. Elias retired as the Director of the U.S. National Arboretum, effective December 31, 2009. Only the fifth director of the Arboretum, since its founding in 1927 Dr. Elias served in this position for over 16 years. During his tenure the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum enjoyed significant development of its physical structure and at the same time saw an expansion of the tree and viewing stone collections.

A native of Cairo, Illinois, Dr. Elias attended Southern Illinois University where he received undergraduate and graduate degrees in Botany. In 1969 he completed a Ph.D. in Biology from St. Louis University with a dissertation on the taxonomic study of the genus of plants in the coffee family. After completing his graduate work, he became the Assistant Curator of the Arnold Arboretum in Cambridge, Massachusetts. During the years between 1971 and 1984, he worked as Dendrologist and Assistant Director of the Cary Arboretum at the New York Botanical Garden, and held the position of Adjunct Professor at the College of Environmental Science and Forestry of Syracuse University.

In 1984 he was appointed the Director of the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in California and, at the same time, served as Chairman of



Photo: Joseph Mullan

the Department of Botany at the Claremont Graduate School in Claremont, California. He continued in both of these positions until he assumed his duties at the Arboretum on November 28, 1993.

Dr. Elias has numerous publications to his credit including two esteemed field guides: *The Complete Trees of North America, Field Guide and Natural History* (1980, rev. ed., 1989); and *Field Guide to North American Edible Wild Plants* (1983). He was also the editor of *Extinction is Forever* (1977). All three books were named

by the American Library Association as among the “100 Best Books in Science and Technology” in the years in which they were published. He is also the author of four other books: *Illustrated Guide to Street Trees* (1981); *The Biology of Nectaries* (1983); *Conservation and Management of Rare and Endangered Plants* (1987); and *Experience in Introduction and Conservation of Plants in the USSR and the U.S.* (1992). In addition he has written and edited over 130 articles in scientific as well as popular journals.

Throughout his career he has been active in professional organizations and has served as President of the American Society of Plant

Taxonomists, as Vice President and board member of the California Native Plant Society, and as a board member of the American Public Gardens Association and the Association of Systematic Collections.

Because of his distinguished accomplishments in the field of horticulture and plant science, he was honored by the American Society of Plant Taxonomists with their *Cooley Award* and by the New York Botanical Garden with a *Distinguished Service*

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President's Letter



We ring in 2010 with a major change in the leadership of the U.S. National Arboretum. After over 16 years as the fifth Director of the USNA,

Dr. Tom Elias retired as of December 31, 2009. We welcome Dr. Ramon Jordan who has taken the helm as the Interim Director.

Under Dr. Elias's watch, the Museum expanded dramatically—both in terms of its physical structure and its collections, and the partnership between NBF and the USNA became even stronger. I had the pleasure of working with Tom on behalf of NBF during his entire tenure; we even made a number of memorable trips to Japan together to strengthen our network of friends and supporters of the Museum. NBF is extremely grateful to Tom for his many outstanding accomplishments while Director and for making the Museum the world-class institution it is today.

We congratulate Dr. Jordan on his appointment as Interim Director. He brings a fresh leadership style and perspective to the job, along with deep knowledge of the National Arboretum. All of us at NBF look forward to working closely with

Ramon as 2010 and the future unfold.

At the top of NBF's list of priorities for 2010 is the renovation of the Japanese Pavilion, which is the most visited site on the USNA grounds. It was the first pavilion in the Museum, opening in July 1976 to display the 53 bonsai given by the people of Japan to the citizens of the United States on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence.

Now, almost 35 years later the Japanese Pavilion is disintegrating and needs to be completely renovated. The coating on the wall is falling off and the block walls are crumbling. The display benches for the trees and the fences that protect them are rotted beyond repair. The loose-gravel paths severely limit the accessibility of some visitors. Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Agriculture does not have the funds to make these essential repairs.

Therefore, NBF is launching a major campaign to raise the funds needed to save this historic Japanese Pavilion. This is an opportunity not only to preserve this venerable structure for the future, but also to expand and improve the display of the beautiful trees in the collection. I hope you will lend your support to this important initiative.

Dr. Thomas S. Elias retires

Continued from page 1

Award. He also received a *Distinguished Alumnus Award* from Southern Illinois University and was the commencement speaker at his alma mater in 1989. His work as Director of the Arboretum was recognized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary **Dan Glickman** with a *Presidential Rank Award* as a Meritorious Executive (2000), and he was presented with an honorary doctorate from the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Russia (2003) for his direction, over a period of more

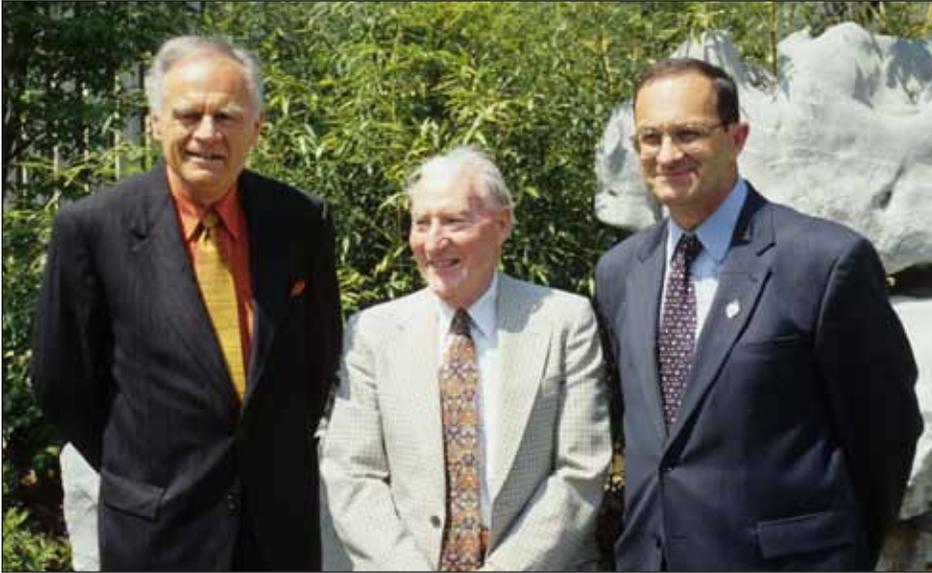
than 20 years, of a botanical exchange program between the United States and Russia (Soviet Union).

As Director of the Arboretum, Dr. Elias expanded educational and visitor services programs and made overall improvements to the gardens, collections and grounds, including a new directional signage system. Working with the staff, he developed a Strategic Plan (1994, updated 2003) for the realization of long range goals and he oversaw the development of a Master Plan for the facilities and grounds (2000). He also directed the development of the Arboretum's website, obtained new authorities from Congress, which

Dr. Thomas S. Elias retires

Continued from page 2

allowed the Arboretum to receive greater private support for its programs, and, most importantly, he was instrumental in raising the public visibility of the Arboretum, internationally as well as nationally.



Dr. Elias with the late Dr. Marc Cathey and the late Dr. John Creech, previous directors of the Arboretum.

During his time as Director the Museum underwent major changes. The Yee-sun Wu Chinese Pavilion was completed as was the Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion and Special Exhibits wing. The first two stages of the Courtyard project, the Maria Rivera Vanzant Upper Courtyard and the Rose Family Garden and Lower Courtyard were designed and installed and the North American Collection of Viewing Stones was added to the Museum's holdings. In addition, through his efforts, the Museum's library collection was



Left to right: Curator Jack Sustic, Tom Elias, the Honorable Thomas Foley, Curator Jim Hughes and NBF President, Felix Laughlin.

enhanced by the acquisition of many historical publications related to bonsai and viewing stones.

Dr. Elias worked with many people important to the bonsai community to achieve these improvements for the Museum including, from Japan: **Saburo Kato, Hirozumi Ichihara** (former Chairman of the Japan Satsuki

Association), **Daizo Iwasaki, Toshio Kawamoto** (founder of Saikei), **Kenichi Oguchi** (Japanese collector of bonsai and suiseki and noted calligrapher), **Arishige Matsuura** (Chairman of the Nippon Suiseki Association), **Shinichi Nakajima** (Chairman of the Nippon Bonsai Growers Association), and **Kenichi Obuchi** (former Prime Minister of Japan); as well as **John Naka, Yuji Yoshimura** and **Harry**



Dr. Elias with his chrysanthemum stone on exhibit.

Hirao from the United States. He also worked with all of the Museum's Curators: **Robert Drechsler, Warren Hill, Jack Sustic** and **Jim Hughes**; both Presidents of NBF: **Frederic Ballard** and **Felix Laughlin**; and both of NBF's Executive Directors: **Maryann Orlando** and **Johann Klodzen**.

In close collaboration with Museum staff and NBF, he enhanced the reputation of the Museum by hosting two international symposia, one on bonsai and viewing stones (2002) and one on penjing (2004); by sponsoring two North American bonsai pot competitions; by hosting three bonsai and Asian festival events; and through the development of Museum exhibits that are widely recognized for their excellence in content and display. He has established many close ties with the international bonsai community and during the 5th World Bonsai Convention in 2005 he presided over a splendid banquet for convention participants at the Arboretum.

In retirement Dr. Elias and his wife **Hiromi Nakaoji** will move to Claremont, California. There he will pursue his scholarly work by writing about chrysanthemum stones and other related subjects. He will also be actively involved with local, national and international bonsai and viewing stones organizations. Finally, he has been appointed an Honorary Director of NBF and will therefore continue his longtime collaboration with NBF in seeking to make the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum the best museum of its kind in the world.



Dr. Elias with Mr. & Mrs. Daizo Iwasaki during the 5th World Bonsai Convention.

Museum Notes

- NBF congratulates **Dr. Ramon Jordan** on his appointment as Interim Director of the U.S. National Arboretum following the retirement of **Dr. Tom Elias**. Dr. Jordan has had a distinguished career as a Research Plant Pathologist with the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In a recent meeting with staff, stakeholders and volunteers, he asked everyone "to help me, to help you, to make this the very best Arboretum."



Interim Director of the U.S. National Arboretum, Dr. Ramon Jordan.

- Museum Curator, **Jack Sustic**, worked under **Tohru Suzuki** at the Daiju-en Nursery in Japan during the month of November and assisted Mr. Suzuki at the annual *Taikan-ten* exhibit in Kyoto. A complete report of this trip will be a feature of the Spring 2010 *NBF Bulletin*.



Early morning at Tohru Suzuki's Daiju-en Nursery.



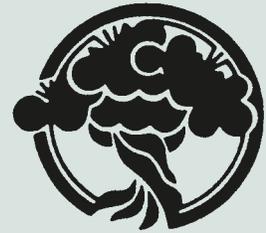
Jean Smith's Black Mountain Stone.

- The Museum has acquired a new viewing stone donated by **Edward Smith** from the collection of the late **Jean Smith**. The mountain stone with a small water pool was acquired by Mrs. Smith from **Masaru Yamaki**, the donor of the Museum's oldest bonsai.
- The third annual Bonsai Festival sponsored by the Potomac Bonsai Association (PBA), the U.S. National Arboretum and NBF will take place on the Arboretum grounds from April 30–May 2, 2010. The event will feature **Steven Tolley** from Great Britain. The NBF Board annual board meeting will also be held that weekend on Friday, April 30th.
- **Jane Ashley Fennell**, who was a member of PBA and part of the planning committee for the 5th World Bonsai Convention (1995) died in Bend, Oregon in August. Jane was responsible for planning the lovely reception at the Freer Gallery of Art during the Washington D.C. Convention.



Jane Ashley Fennell with Frank Thomas during the 5th WBC Convention Banquet at the Arboretum.

- The NBF Calendar for 2010 is available for purchase at \$15.00, which includes postage. Please send orders, checks or credit card information, in the enclosed envelope.



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