



Jim Hughes Appointed Curator

Jim Hughes was appointed on November 3, 2005 as the 4th curator in the history of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, replacing **Jack Sustic**, who retired in July of this year.

Jim is a native of Minnesota and a graduate of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota where he received an undergraduate degree in English with a minor in Education. After teaching for 10 years at various high schools in the Minneapolis suburbs, Jim went back to school to study computer programming. In the meantime Jim started his bonsai career by taking his first class with **Ann Erb** and joining the Minnesota Bonsai Society.

Then, spurred on by a desire to escape the limitations of gardening in Zone 3, Jim came to the Washington, D.C. area in 1996. He moved to his Capitol Hill rowhouse on a Thursday and the following Saturday he was at the U.S. National Arboretum inquiring about becoming a volunteer at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum. He joined the Brookside Bonsai Society and soon assumed a leadership role in that organization as Education Vice President and later President. In addition he has been an active member of the Potomac Bonsai Association since that time.

Jim's time as a volunteer in the Museum overlapped the term of the late **Dan**

Chiplis, the final year of **Bob Drechsler's** career as curator, several years under Curator **Warren Hill** and finally his time with **Jack Sustic**. Jim also served on the

Board of Directors of the National Bonsai Foundation and was for a short period the Treasurer of NBF.

In September 2002 Jim accepted the position as Assistant Curator for Plant Collections working under the supervision of Jack Sustic. Since July 2005 he has been Acting Curator of the Museum.

In 2004 he was a key member of the planning committee for the symposium on *The Art of Chinese Penjing* sponsored by the U.S. National Arboretum and NBF. In March of this year Jim went to Shanghai China to study penjing and the origins of bonsai at the Shanghai Botanical Garden. He worked there with **Shao Hiu Jun**, **Thang Jan Fei** and **Zhao Wei** on both rock and tree penjing. He also had the opportunity to tour the classical gardens of Suzhou and visited other Chinese gardens in Shanghai.

Jim brings to his current position the unique background of working with all former Museum staff. He hopes the Museum will continue to be a national showcase of world-class bonsai as well as an educational setting for all people interested in penjing, bonsai, viewing stones and related arts.

In his spare time, he now gardens on a sunny location in a nearby Maryland suburb of Washington, D.C.



Photo: Stefanye Washington

Jim Hughes, new Curator of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum.

Haibun and Haiku from the Gulf Coast

Vaughn Banting, a long time member of the NBF Board of Directors and the donor of three bonsai to the North American Collection of the Museum, lives in Metairie, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans. During the recent hurricanes, *Katrina* and *Rita*, he and his wife, Gayle stayed with family in Baton Rouge. His home sustained some damage but not as much as neighboring communities.

In the aftermath of the hurricanes Vaughn coped with the devastation around him by writing reflective *haibun*. *Haibun* is a two-part poem, the first part of which is a narrative description of an event, the second part a haiku that sums up the narrative or offers a different perspective of the event.

Here are two of Vaughn's *haibun*.

Second Spring

The floodwaters caused by hurricane *Katrina* stayed on the ground for weeks and at levels far above the tree's root systems. This caused a false dormancy to set in and when the waters finally receded it was still warm enough outside to convince the trees that it was springtime. Right on

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President's Letter



We are delighted that **Jim Hughes** has been appointed to the position of Curator of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum. As we point out in the front-page story on his appointment, Jim has worked with everyone who has been on the staff of the Museum during its almost 30-year existence. This is a most remarkable historical continuum and very appropriate for someone who stands as a guardian of treasures that have been handed down over generations. We look forward to working closely with Jim and the rest of the Museum staff to carry on this incredible legacy for future generations.

The end of every year is a time for reflection on what has transpired over the previous twelve months. This year we look back on a World Bonsai Convention that exceeded our hopes and dreams. While all the praise from participants for our efforts is deeply appreciated, what give us the greatest pleasure is knowing that the highlight of the event for our visitors was the evening dinner at the U.S. National Arboretum on May 29, 2005. Here they could enjoy not only a sumptuous repast, but most importantly from our perspective they could savor the exquisite beauty of the grounds and collections of the Museum. If you were not here to share in that event, please take comfort in knowing that it would not have been possible without your generous help and support.

Thank you for working with us in 2005, and we look forward to joining with you in 2006 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Museum and the beginning of the next chapter in our history together.

Felix

Ernesta Drinker Ballard

Ernesta Drinker Ballard who was elected to the NBF Board of Directors in 2004, died on August 11, 2005 in Philadelphia. She was the wife of the late **Frederic Ballard**, the first President of NBF.

Mrs. Ballard's career in bonsai began in 1960 when she took a class in bonsai that was taught by Yuji Yoshimura at the Arnold Arboretum. Later she wrote one of the first books published on bonsai in the United States, *The Art of Training Plants*. It was

her interest in bonsai that persuaded her husband to take up the art as well. Together they introduced John Naka to bonsai practitioners on the East Coast.

But her horticultural passions were not limited to bonsai. She was the Director and President of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society for almost 20 years, and during that time she directed the annual Philadelphia Flower Show, which gained international recognition under her leadership. She was a member of the Fairmont Park Commission and started an important community gardening program, *Philadelphia Green*. For these works and others she was named a *Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania*.

A story on her death in a Philadelphia newspaper called her "a treasure." Her presence in the world of horticulture will be deeply missed.



Ernesta Drinker Ballard and Frederic Ballard.

HAIBUN AND HAIKU

(Continued from page 1)

cue they broke their dormancy and put out a fresh set of leaves.

confused but positive
leaves flushing from a
dormant tree

Shadowy Park

Before hurricane *Katrina* one of the small pleasures in my life was to take my handicapped scooter and visit a small park not far from our home. Apart from its other charms it provided a perfect place for me to indulge in my hobby of writing haiku. Then, as a horticulturist, I had always been interested in dendrology and this park contained quite an assortment of tree *genera* just begging to be investigated. Also, each time before entering the park I was careful to stop off at a grocery store to purchase some peanuts for the squirrels.

Feeding the squirrels, identifying interesting trees and writing haiku under their branches; that was me in the days leading up to *Katrina*. I will always remember my first trip back into that park after the broken and toppled trees had been cleared enough for me to gain legal access. So many trees had been blown down or ripped apart by the winds that it was now a totally different place. The sun shown down unhindered by the once graceful trees that had given the little park its magic.

the only one left
a squirrel jumps
from branch to branch

And one final haiku:

in *Katrina*'s wake
priceless collections ruined
every bonsai dead

Photographs of the hurricane damage and additional *haibun* and *haiku* can be found on Vaughn's website: www.vlbanting.com

Volunteering at the Museum From My Point of View

By César Portocarrero*

Warren Hill and Jack Sustic had interviewed me. I had passed muster and was on my way to the arboretum to start volunteering at the Bonsai Museum.

"Good morning" I said as I walked into the Yoshimura Center. "Good afternoon" was the reply. I won't mention names, but she'll remember. It was about 10 in the morning and, as I learned later, "tea time" at the Museum.

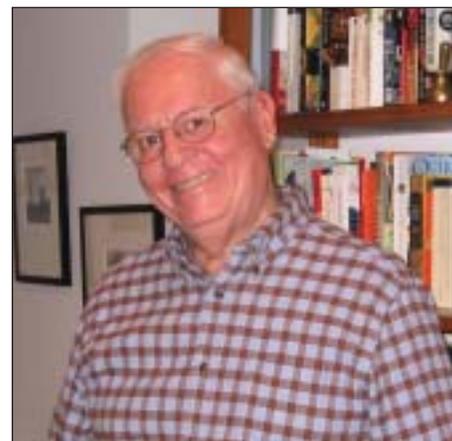
Goshin was right there and a volunteer was trimming that special California forest. I was asked to help. That was my first task as a volunteer. Seven years later I am still in awe. What a privilege it is to be one of the few people able to help take care of the Nation's bonsai and penjing! That sensation becomes even more vivid when you are working on the 375 year old *Yamaki* pine.

At the Museum one soon learns that volunteers are there to help with any required task. Some you don't like. Actually, my theory is that the trees don't like some of the tasks. Imagine being a handsome and pampered old black pine. And here comes this person trying to pluck your old needles! Or, worse yet, putting some wires and bending your venerable limbs... you'd prickle right back! Ah, but the white pines, females after all, take it stoically because they know they will look more attractive and capture a visitor's eye.

Any task at the exhibit tables attracts questions from the visitors. By now most questions are predictable: "How often do you have to water them?" "Every hour on the half hour" "But it is 2:15" "Don't tell anybody!"

Once you have their attention, you explain: "Well it depends..."

I had my first bonsai when we lived in Mexico City. Yes, I bought a juniper in a town outside the city. My father-in-law,



César Portocarrero at home.

Photo: Georgia Portocarrero

who introduced me to bonsai, carried the tree on his lap for the trip back to our home. I drove slowly, lest the rough roads cause a branch to break, and we kept spraying water on the tree. Despite my degrees in forestry and entomology, that's how much I knew about this future hobby of mine.

The weather in Mexico is benign, so I was able to grow many trees and begin a collection. When we were to move back to Washington I spent days, to my wife's dismay, cleaning the soil off the roots of all my plants to comply with the USDA regulations. My young daughter, our Airedale, my bonsai and I piled into a car and drove four days to Washington, D.C. We arrived in the middle of winter and all my plants died. It is said that to be a good bonsaist one has to lose a few trees. I have lost all that I needed.

Soon after arriving in Washington I joined the Brookside Bonsai Society, read a lot about bonsai and attended many workshops to hone my bonsai skills. Then I was ready to volunteer.

Being a volunteer at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum is a rewarding experience. It also introduced me to the larger world of bonsai in this and other countries. I've learned many things and made very good friends through bonsai.

*In addition to volunteering weekly at the Museum, César edits the Brookside Bonsai Society Newsletter and is the Treasurer of the National Bonsai Foundation, the North American Bonsai Federation and the 5th World Bonsai Convention (Ed.)

NBF Notes

- ❖ Former National Bonsai & Penjing Museum Curator, **Jack Sustic**, has been appointed to the NBF Board of Directors and the NBF Executive Committee. He will bring many gifts to both the board and the committee because of his many years of experience as Intern, Assistant Curator and Curator at the Museum, as well as his work as Co-Chair of the 5th World Bonsai Convention.
- ❖ **Erratum:** The Summer 2005 *NBF Bulletin* reported in the story: "Three Good

Friends" that "President Richard M. Nixon was given bonsai from Japan as a gift. . ." That should have read: "President Richard M. Nixon was given penjing from China as a gift. . ." Thanks to **Bob Drechsler** for catching this mistake.

- ❖ The 5th World Bonsai Convention Book is available from Stone Lantern for \$85 plus shipping. www.stonelantern.com.

Curator's Corner

By James Hughes

Gardening is not some game by which one proves his superiority over others, nor is it a marketplace for the display of elegant things that others cannot afford. It is, on the contrary, a growing work of creation, endless in its changing elements. It is not a monument or an achievement, but a sort of traveling, a kind of pilgrimage you might say, often a bit grubby or sweaty, though true pilgrims do not mind that. A garden is not a picture, but a language, which is of course the major art of life.

—Henry Mitchell, in
The Essential Earthman

A couple of days after being appointed curator at the Museum, I read an article on Henry Mitchell, a nationally known garden writer who published a weekly column for the Washington Post. His philosophical take on gardening was always perceptive, and the excerpt that I cite above from one of his books captures, for me, much of the spirit of this Museum.

For many of us, bonsai is the major art in our lives. It is a language of gardening that now crosses many countries and cultures. The visitors to our Museum come from all over the world and speak many languages. Yet, they universally appreciate the beauty of our treasures. The trees have a language that everyone understands.

Mitchell suggests that gardens should not be a marketplace for things that others cannot afford. Hopefully our Museum, though filled with priceless objects, can inspire many of our visitors to try their hand at this unique art form. Everyone can afford a bonsai, if they create it themselves.

Mitchell advises that gardens are not monuments but processes. These trees are certainly great achievements in design, but they are not static. Our Museum is a growing work of creation. Staff and volunteers have been given a designed creation, yet have a hand at guiding its future growth. They have an impact on the development of each of our trees. Yet, they are also aware that all egos in bonsai are influenced and sometimes humbled by the changing forces of nature.

Living in Washington, we at the Museum heartily agree that gardening is often grubby and sweaty, but most of us who tend to the trees don't seem to mind. Is our work at the Museum a 'kind of pilgrimage'? Perhaps it is. Certainly the journey is long—the staff and volunteers are only a few of the people who have cared for these trees. Temporarily, we have been assigned to them, but there will be many others who will follow us. Are we all on a pilgrimage? I think so. Our visitors certainly are. For many of them, this Museum is an important destination when they come to visit Washington. Many come back time and again.

To support NBF, please mail your contribution with your name and address to:

César Portocarrero
NBF Treasurer
3501 New York Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

An envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

Categories of Support

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Our first-time visitors often convey a sense of wonder and awe when they see these inspirational works of art. For them and for all of us this Museum is a special place. Sometimes, when I close the Museum gates and have the place all to myself, and the light is low in the sky, and the shadows fill the pavilions, it is very much a spiritual comfort for me.

Children and Bonsai

For the last three years we have been offering our youngest visitors an opportunity to voice their comments about the collections and the Museum on a sign-in sheet that asks: "What do you think about bonsai?"

Many give pithy answers: "Cool!" "Beautiful!" "Wow!" "Fantastic!" or "Awesome!" These comments, capture the zest of the viewer while testifying to the magnificence of the collections.

Other youngsters, however, are more reflective. Here are a few of our favorites:

Raymond, age 10, using both a hip descriptor and possibly a new vocabulary word, says: "It's cool and delicate, ineffable = indescribable."

Sarah, age 10, is cautiously philosophical: "It is a great way to calm and meditate, if it is a symbol."

A poignant cautionary for more inclusive display was offered by James, age 6, from a school for the blind: "I can't see them."

Helen, age 9, praised the exhibit **Bonsai: Test Your Knowledge!**, while demonstrating her recall of it: "There are good facts. It is weird how if you plant it in a pot it's small. If you plant it outside, it's big."

On child, age 8, succinctly stated the essence of the display: "Trees but little"

Aiyanna, age 9, tried her hand at a haiku or maybe even a cheer: "They are intelligent
They are unique
I love bonsai trees"

In summary, a declaration that we think most visitors share, was given by Charlie, age 8: "It's a good place."

In future issues we will pass along more from our fledgling reviewers.



A young visitor inspecting bonsai.

Photo: Michael James

Museum Notes

❖ The Fall Foliage show was on display in the Special Exhibits wing of the Mary Mrose International Pavillion from October 29th–November 6th. Visitation was exceptionally high this year with over 2,000 visitors viewing the stunning exhibit.



Ligustrum obtusifolium (Japanese Privet).

Photo: Stefanye Washington

❖ The position of **Assistant Curator for Plant Collections** of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum will be advertised soon. Interested applicants should consult the NBF website for information and deadlines for applying for this position.