News for friends, contributors and members of The National Bonsai Foundation

Volume XXIII, Number 1/2

The First Curator's Apprenticeship

By Micah Miles

When I became the intern for the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum's First Curator's Apprenticeship program, the lesson I remember learning first is that every bonsai has a story. And from day one I began unraveling the stories of some of the oldest and most pristine works of living art in our nation.

Spring/Summer 2012

I started each Sunday in the same way, watering

and removing dead leaves from the trees in the tropical exhibit, but after that each workday was an exciting new experience entirely unlike the time before. I learned techniques, as every apprentice does, by getting hands-on practice working with the trees. In my first few weeks I helped with preserving dead wood, I wired branches so that they would grow in the direction we wanted, and I pinched off the ends of new growth on branches to encourage back-budding. In one of my later weeks I even played a tiny part in international affairs by helping to prepare the trees that were to be displayed during the Prime Minister of Japan's state dinner with the U.S. Secretary of State.

During my 8-week internship, as I watered, pruned and wired, I even gave the trees special names and so I too became a bonsai fanatic. In the words of **Ted Pickett**, a volunteer



First Curator, Robert Drechsler and First Curator's Apprentice, Micah Miles.

who worked with me, "Bonsai is not just a hobby, it's a lifestyle." Now I possess my own small bonsai collection, each in different stages of development and I couldn't be more excited for the future.

But when I think back on the work that I have done, the trees that I have seen and the things that I have learned, it is the people I have met that have made the most impact on my experience. For example, I have never been to an event where one of the guests of honor was an intern, and yet when I attended the National Bonsai Foundation's evening reception in early May, that is exactly how everyone made me feel. All the people that greeted me were warm and welcoming and generous with advice and knowledge to help me get started on my own in the world of bonsai.

My time at the National Arboretum has been the most fascinating and

exciting time of my life. Every day that I came, I told my boss, Museum Curator **Jack Sustic**, that this was the best job I could ever have and that's the absolute truth! I only wish that it could have lasted longer. I wish that I could have had more time to spend learning and absorbing and experiencing everything that this place has to offer me. I also wish that I had more

time to experiment, practice, and gain a stronger background in the art of bonsai. But most importantly I wish that I had more time to meet more people, hear more stories and make even more connections than the ones I have already made, because I have come to realize that it's the people, as much as it is the trees, that make the bonsai experience so extraordinary.

I want to thank the National Bonsai Foundation and the U.S. National Arboretum for making my internship so unforgettable.

Micah Miles is an Environmental Science and Policy major at the University of Maryland.

The First Curator's Apprenticeship was instituted to honor the Museum's first curator, Robert Drechsler. If you would like to contribute to fund future interns, please note on your check "First Curator's Apprenticeship."



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President's Letter



Congratulations to Micah Miles, as the first of what we hope is a long line of First Curator's Apprentices. Through

this new NBF program, we honor Robert "Bonsai Bob" Drechsler, the first Curator of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, and hopefully it will inspire the younger generation to take up the practice of bonsai. As Micah discovered, "bonsai is not just a hobby, it's a lifestyle"—and a lifestyle that can open our eyes to the beauty of nature and provide deep fulfillment.

Japan's 1976 Bicentennial Gift of 53 magnificent bonsai to the American people was a milestone in the history of bonsai in this country, as it helped to propel the abiding wave of appreciation for the art of bonsai throughout the United States. It is one of the reasons why so many Americans enjoy and esteem bonsai today. Now we need your help: The Japanese Pavilion at the Museum, built 36 years ago to house and display the Japanese Collection, is in dire need of repair and renovation, at an estimated cost of \$2 million.

Included with this Bulletin is NBF's case statement for the CAMPAIGN FOR THE JAPANESE PAVILION: A GIFT **RENEWED**. We hope that you will carefully read this case statement and consider how you can join us in this effort. As of June 1, 2012, NBF has received pledges and donations of almost \$1.6 million. But we still need additional contributions from NBF members and supporters like you to reach our campaign goal of \$2 million. In September we will mail a pledge form to you and I hope that you will join me in supporting this campaign to renew the historic Japanese Pavilion.

tulis

New NBF Directors

Two Honorary Directors and six Directors were added to the NBF Board this Spring.

Mrs. Naemi Iwasaki of Ehime, Japan was invited to become an Honorary Director of NBF in January 2012. Along with her husband, the late Daizo Iwasaki, she has been an Ambassador of Bonsai spreading good will and friendship throughout the world.

Mr. Kazuo Moriyama of Nagoya Aichi, Japan accepted the invitation of NBF to become an Honorary Director in February 2012. Mr. Moriyama is a Councilor of the

Nippon Bonsai Association and has received five Kokufu First Prize awards. His Magnolia stellata (Star Magnolia) is part of the Museum's Japanese Collection.

Dr. Joseph Gutierrez of McLean, Virginia has been involved in bonsai since 1969. He has studied with numerous American and Japanese bonsai masters, including John Naka and Yuji Yoshimura. Joe is a long-time member of the Potomac Bonsai Association and has served as President of that organization. He is a volunteer in the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum and was present at the gala proceedings when the Japanese Collection was

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John Naka's California Juniper

By Cheryl Manning

John Naka took pen to paper thousands of times to sketch his vision for a student's bonsai, but he rarely sketched his own trees. When editing John Naka's Sketchbook I wanted to include one. On page 13 of that book is a sketch that John made of his own show tree, a cascading California juniper, for the 1996 Nanpukai exhibition brochure. This bonsai is still alive and well in the back yard of the Naka home, now occupied by John's eldest son Gene.

I was curious about the story of this large and impressive bonsai so I spoke with some of John's earliest students and oldest friends including Marybel Balendonck, Frank Goya, Harry Hirao and Ben Oki. They agreed that this tree had been in John's collection for several decades, but could not recall specifics. But they were happy to reminisce about the early days of collecting California natives.

John was always on the lookout for wonderful bonsai material, whether it was in a client's garden, a nursery, or in the abandoned Southern California neighborhood scheduled for demolition before construction of Interstate 5. However, John collected some of his oldest and most interesting bonsai in the Mojave Desert.

In the mid 1950s John not only practiced the art of bonsai but also studied oil painting. It was in one of these classes that John first heard about California junipers. His art teacher, after seeing photos of John's bonsai, mentioned stunted, contorted junipers full of character in the hills surrounding the city of Palmdale. That was all he needed to hear. The following Sunday, John and his bonsai buddy **Micky Mizutari** were in the desert digging for green gold. They were hooked and drove to the desert every week for many years.

The California juniper grows in a very harsh environment. Desert heat and lack of rain for many months cause the trees to go dormant in the summer. Drying, year-round winds, and frigid winters with occasional snow, limit the growing season to a few weeks in the spring. Trunk girth can grow as little as 1" every 75 years. Natural die-back and termite damage add character to trees that are often several hundred years old.

California junipers adapted well to John's back yard and the cascade was no exception. It was planted in a beautiful *Tokoname* pot after refinement of the foliage and *shari*. Although it always looked showready, it rarely made it into exhibitions because it was too cumbersome to move.

John never tired of collecting native trees or enjoying the serenity of their natural habitat. In 1999 he joined Harry Hirao, Marybel Balendonck and a few others on one last excursion to the Mohave Desert. John helped his friend (and NBF President) Felix Laughlin to find and dig out a little gem. John then nurtured it for more than a year before sending it to Felix's back yard.

Harry "Mr. California Juniper" Hirao recalled that John had been collecting in the mountains for four years before inviting Harry for a life-changing trip. John was the first person to walk the hills in search of a masterpiece, but by no means the last. Hundreds of bonsai aficionados have followed in his footsteps during the past 60 years. Magnificent trees, while a little harder to find these days, are still being collected. Thanks John!

John Naka's Sketchbook, a compilation of John's sketches from around the world, is available from Stone Lantern www.stonelantern.com. A portion of each sale goes to NBF's John Naka Fund.



The tree in 2004—one month before John Naka's death.



John's drawing of his Juniper.



Felix Laughlin and John Naka on a collecting expedition.

to: Cheryl Mannii

Museum Notes

• The winning pot designed by Sara Rayner Alms for the Bonsai Container Purchase Award Competition arrived in the Museum in late January. Soon thereafter the Cedrus atlantica 'Glauca' (Blue Atlas Cedar) donated by Frederic and Ernesta Ballard was repotted in the new container. Curator Jack Sustic believes that this pot is visually soft enough to match the texture of the foliage, yet strong enough to support and complement the overall composition.



Blue Atlas Cedar in the new pot.

- In January of this year Museum Curator Jack Sustic took a discarded mist system that was gathering dust in the basement of the Yee-sun Wu Chinese Pavilion and installed it in the Kaneshiro Tropical Green House. This mist system increased the amount of humidity in the tropical house during the winter months and within two weeks of its introduction a marked improvement was noticed in the overall appearance of the trees.
- Helen Souder, a longtime NBF
 Director who specialized in
 growing tropical bonsai, died in
 2008. Her death was brought to
 NBF's attention only recently.
 Her Ficus nerifolia is in the
 North American Collection of
 the Museum.



Helen Souder's ficus.

• The Potomac Bonsai Association has made a handsome pledge of \$10,000 to the *Campaign for the Japanese Pavilion: A Gift Renewed*. This is the largest gift thus far from a bonsai club or group.



Frank Goya's saikei.

• Frank Goya of Los Angeles has donated a saikei of 13 *Juniperus chinensis* 'Femina' and 3 *Juniperus procumbens* 'Nana' to the North American Collection.



Pinus parviflora.

• The 3rd U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition, organized by NBF Director William N. Valavanis was held on June 9 and 10 in Rochester, NY. Museum Curator Jack Sustic displayed two trees from the collection: a pomegranate (Punica granatum) donated by Alice Naka and the Japanese white pine (Pinus parviflora) donated by Daizo Iwasaki.



GEICO Insurance Company on site at the Museum.

- GEICO Insurance Company recently filmed a segment at the Museum for a future television commercial.
- The mobile app for the Museum is almost ready to be launched. The project started last year when **Cortina Productions** approached NBF with the proposal that they design a *pro bono* app that could



Mobile app developed by Cortina Productions.

Museum Notes—

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be used as a prototype for future design commissions. **Kathleen Emerson-Dell** has worked closely with **Owen Young** of Cortina to bring the venture to fruition. The app will be available by the end of the summer in Apple stores as a free download for iPhones, iPads and Android devices.

 The Fifth Annual Bonsai Festival sponsored by the Potomac Bonsai Association, the National Bonsai



Suthin Sukosolvisit demonstrates his technique.

Foundation and the U.S. National Arboretum was held on May 4–6. The headline presenters this year were **Harry Hirao** and **Suthin Sukosolvisit**. The following weekend the Museum commemorated World Bonsai Day, which honors **Saburo Kato** for his vision of peace through bonsai.



Eunice Corp presenting Jack Sustic with a bonsai painting from her collection at the 2005 World Bonsai Convention.

 Eunice Corp of Cadillac, Michigan, who was one of the driving forces behind the new bonsai stamp series, died in June. A student of John Naka's, she began petitioning the U.S. Postal Service for a bonsai stamp over 13 years ago and sought NBF's help in promoting this effort. She was thrilled when the stamps were released in January of this year and very proud that she had played such a key role in getting them issued.



Diplomatic toast before Museum Ezo Spruce.

• U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton requested that the Ezo Spruce bonsai that was given to her husband President Bill Clinton by Saburo Kato to be on display at a State Dinner for Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda of Japan.

New NBF Directors —

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received by the U.S. National Arboretum in 1976.

Dr. Karen Harkaway of Moorestown, New Jersey has been involved in bonsai for only six years. But in that time she has studied with several bonsai masters and is currently Vice-President of the Bonsai Society of South Jersey, the Pennsylvania Bonsai Society and the American Bonsai Society. Her trees have been exhibited at the Pennsylvania Flower Show, the Mid-Atlantic Bonsai Societies exhibition and the Second U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition. Karen is eager to promote bonsai to a wider American audience.

Mrs. Hideko Metaxas of Larkspur, California is well known nationally and internationally to students of suiseki, Ikenobo ikebana, tokonoma display, as well as in the world of bonsai. She has served as a member of the Board, a Trustee, Vice-President and President of the Golden State Bonsai Federation and as a director of Bonsai Clubs International. The author of several well-received articles in English on suiseki and tokonoma display, she has received numerous awards, including the prestigious *Ryokuhaku* (Green and White) Juyukosho, Japan Agricultural Society, Japan for her contribution and dedication to the horticultural arts.

Mr. Michael Pollock of Pound Ridge, New York was first introduced to bonsai when he took a course with Yuji Yoshimura in 1982. After a 15 year hiatus he took up bonsai once again and formed a group to study with Colin Lewis in his Ho Yoku School of Bonsai. In 2004 Michael was the winner of the American Bonsai Society's Joshua Roth New

Talent Competition. He is now serving a second term as President of the Yama Ki Bonsai Society in New York. His trees have been displayed in many shows and exhibitions and he has received the "Best in Show" award three times from the Mid-Atlantic Bonsai Societies.

Dr. Errol Reese of Hillsboro Beach, Florida is a former Dean of the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery, President of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, and a founder of the National Museum of Dentistry, an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution. He has also served as a consultant to the World Health Organization in Asia. For several years Errol has been a volunteer at the Bonsai Exhibition at the Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens, where he also serves on its Board of Trustees and chairs the Facilities Committee. Errol is the

 $continued\ on\ page\ 6$

A Visit to Doug Paul's Kennett Collection

In early Spring of this year NBF Director Doug Paul invited the entire NBF Board of Directors to visit his renowned Kennett Collection in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. The date was set for May 3rd, the day before the Board meeting and through the generosity of Marybel Balendonck, a small bus was rented for the trip. The May morning was perfect as the group (Felix Laughlin, Jim Hughes, Harry Hirao, Glenn Reusch, Chris Cochrane, Carl Morimoto, 'lvn Stevenson, Errol Reese, Joe Gutierrez, Jack and Kathi Wells, development consultant Julie Crudele and former Marketing Alliance Director Dana Faulkner along with Marybel) set out.

Upon their arrival at the Collection they were warmly greeted by **Doug Paul** and joined by **Michael**

Pollock, Dennis Donald and Julian Adams who arrived on their own. The group gathered for lunch and then they were accompanied by Doug on a tour of the gardens and collection.

It is a huge understatement to say that everyone was impressed. Walking through Doug's extensive and elegantly manicured gardens, the visitors admired his vast collection of outstanding bonsai—each a work of art displayed to perfection. Seeing this magnificent display was an inspiration to all of the visitors and provided an endless source of animated conversation on the return trip.

Thank you Doug for your hospitality and for your generosity in sharing the treasures of the Kennett Collection with your fellow directors.











Doug waves good-bye to the group.

New NBF Directors—

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recipient of numerous honors including the Martin Luther King Humanitarian Award and an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of Detroit/Mercy.

Mrs. Marilyn ('lyn) Stevenson of Poway, California had been involved in bonsai since she studied the art in Tokyo, Japan in 1970. She has worked with numerous renowned bonsai masters including Toshio Kawamoto, John Naka and Ben Oki. 'lyn is very active in numerous California bonsai organizations and has served as an officer in several of these. She teaches. lectures and conducts demonstrations throughout Southern California. She was the Chair of the Planning and Construction Project for the new Bonsai Pavilion at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park and continues to work with that project as shohin and tokonoma exhibit areas are added.



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