

Celebrating Gardening, Conservation and More



Mary and Roger Bowers co-chaired the gala and helped raise funds for the new tent.

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH



The lawn reception featured flower-themed tablecloths.

Basking in the glow of saving River Farm forever.

magazine, American Gardener. The organization's mission is "to inspire a culture of gardening and horticultural practices that creates and sustains healthy, beautiful communities and a livable plan-

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BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

American Horticultural Society celebrants honored heroes, heroines, gardening, a new event tent and saving the organization's headquarters when they gathered on a warm June 6 evening at River Farm, overlooking the Potomac River on East Boulevard Drive in Mount Vernon.

Given the 90-plus-degree day, folding hand fans were almost as popular as plants during the outdoor reception and during the dinner. The welcome table offered a basketful of pinkish fans. Guests in colorful, flower-patterned garb stood out among the 255 attendees.

"Gardens make life better. They inspire curiosity and connection with the natural world," said Rochelle Greayer, editor of AHS's



Virginia Delegate Gretchen Bulova, Secretary of Historic and Natural Resources David Bulova and Scott Plein discussed state policies.



Given the 90-plus-degree day, fans were popular.



Many flowers were in bloom, including Belladonna lilies.



The salad had a pansy, an edible flower.



Sada Dahouk and Ben Zeko with Burke and Herbert Bank enjoyed the event.

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et.” And indeed, many commented on the beautiful setting with guests surrounded by gardens.

Jennifer Jewel, host of the public radio program, Cultivating Place, said that we all worry a lot about climate change, war and pollution, for example. “We should never look away from caring and see all that connects us with the land, sky and plant kingdom,” she challenged.

Suzanne Laporte, AHS President and Chief Executive Officer, told attendees that the gala, in part, was “special because of the new tent.” Under a clear heavy plastic tent offering views of the sky, gala-goers enjoyed a three-course dinner by Occasion Caterers which included elderflower-infused melon, sugar snap peas and a fresh pansy topping the trifle dessert.

Laporte commended outgoing Board of Directors Chair Scott Plein for negotiating and finalizing the property’s conservation easement with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, noting that his “knowledge of how it works is enormous.” She applauded his success in securing \$2 million from the Virginia General Assembly to help fund new accessible restrooms. Attendees toasted Plein for preserving River Farm forever. He served four years as chair and will continue as treasurer.

Awardees

Laporte presented the Liberty Hyde Bailey Award for lifetime achievement in horticulture to Dr. John Dole who chuckled that he started loving plants as a 4Her and as a youngster learned how to root roses from his neighbor. He is a horticultural science professor and researcher at North Carolina State University.

For helping save River Farm, Laporte gave the AHS Meritorious Service Award to “the faithful three,” Tim Conlon, Laura Dowling and Holly Shimizu. Shimizu remarked, “We regrouped. We began again. We’ve had a fresh start. This land is conserved forever.”

Conlon, head of Conlon Construction, echoed Shimizu’s comments, saying, “AHS is firmly planted at River Farm.

Jane Josoff read Dowling’s remarks, who wrote, “I could not imagine massive commercial development here and that I let it happen. That conviction was my north star.” Dowling was Chief Floral Designer at the White House from 2009 to 2015. Shimizu is a Maryland horticulturalist and educator.

The dinner’s co-chairs were Roger and Mary Bowers who live nearby.

The Threat

River Farm is a 25-acre site on the Potomac River, one of George Washington’s original five farms. In 2020, the AHS Board of Directors announced plans to sell it, prime waterfront property. Many locals and elected officials objected and launched a campaign to save the property and retain public access. Eventually, some board members resigned. Others re-organized and reversed the sale plan.

On May 1, officials hosted a ribbon cutting to announce a conservation easement to



The new tent helped create a festive event.



Many guests wore flower-patterned attire.



protect the property forever. The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust holds the easement which among other provisions prevents subdividing the property, blocks inap-

propriate development, protects the forests and shoreline and provides public access.

Founded in 1922, American Horticultural Society is a member-based, national non-

profit organization of over 22,000 gardeners, plant enthusiasts, horticultural professionals and partner organizations.

Visit www.ahsgardening.org.