# Announcement of Merger of Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters

April 14, 2023

Dear members of the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters of the ARS,

Before this balmy spring has run its full course, there will be a new Rhododendron Society chapter in our area. Your chapter.

Without a dissenting vote, the boards of the Valley Forge Chapter and of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter have agreed to merge the two chapters into the new Delaware Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. The new chapter will come into being on June 18, 2023. All members of the two merging chapters will be members of the **<u>Delaware Valley Chapter.</u>**

The process that led to this point began in 2020, when the chapters' boards each appointed three individuals to serve as a joint committee to explore the chapters' future(s) and make recommendations to the boards. The pandemic put a crimp in the committee's work, but early this spring it resumed work in earnest. The committee members are Perc Moser, Bob Smetana and Steve Wright from Valley Forge and Gary Ammon, Karel Bernady and Maris Ogg from Greater Philadelphia. (In the earliest meetings, Michael Martin Mills participated as a proxy for Karel Bernady when he was unable to take part.)

The committee and the two chapter boards believe there are numerous advantages to merging, at a time when membership rolls have been declining and the average age of members has been rising. Having a larger pool of people to share the work and business of a single chapter should strengthen the leadership, particularly with an enhanced committee structure. Each of our chapters has a reservoir of rhododendron knowledge and a true camaraderie among fellow enthusiasts. To pass that on to the next generations of rhododendron devotees is important and is far more likely to succeed with a robust single chapter, rather than leaving two separate chapters straining on their own to continue the current level of activities. Already we have combined the truss show, the annual picnic and the annual February joint meeting, and have together met the challenge of hosting national and regional ARS conferences. The committee and the boards believe that full merger is the best way forward and that now is the time to accomplish it.

The annual picnic will be June 18, 2023, at the Bryn Mawr home of Perc and Sally Moser, and we hope for a big turnout, for the membership to inaugurate the Delaware Valley Chapter, to adopt a new set of bylaws, and to elect officers and directors. The joint committee has proposed that the slate of officers be Karel Bernady for president, Gerald (Jerry) O'Dell for vice president, Linda Hartnett for secretary, and Bob Smetana for treasurer, and that all other current board members be elected to serve as an enlarged Board of Directors for the first year. Pursuant to the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge bylaws, members will receive a copy of the proposed new bylaws in May.

It should be noted that the Valley Forge and Greater Philadelphia bylaws are silent on the concept of merger, and the national ARS has a distinctly hands-off approach. Thus, the terms and details of the merger have been formed in the context of what the bylaws do contain, the powers and duties of the boards, and the laws of Pennsylvania. We are particularly indebted to committee member Gary Ammon for his legal knowledge of these processes. Any member may request from either of us a copy of the "term sheet" for the merger.

With the new officers and expanded board, the Delaware Valley Chapter must undertake a year of transition. The two chapters' bank accounts will be combined, and among the decisions ahead are a meeting schedule, committee duties, plant sale(s), grants, and the like. It goes without saying that your input is solicited!

**We look forward to seeing you at the picnic and Annual Meeting on June 18.**

*R. Rabideau,* Pres, Greater Philadelphia & *Gerald J. O'Dell Jr.*, Pres., Valley Forge Chapters