

# GREATER PHILADELPHIA RHODO GRAVURE

Newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society :::::::::: Summer 2017

## *Craig Conover is new chapter president*

Annual meeting and picnic was hosted by Cathy Keim

Which of the following is unlike the others? Lurleen Wallace (of Alabama), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (of Argentina), Craig Conover (of Philadelphia), Hillary Clinton (of New York).

The correct answer is Hillary Clinton, the only one of the four not to become top elected official after his or her spouse had held the same office.

That's an arcane way of saying that Craig Conover is the new president of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, succeeding Kim Kopple, his wife, who served as chapter president for three years. Craig was elected at the chapter's Annual Meeting at the June picnic.

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Steve Henning photo

**Best in Show:** This unnamed cross by Howard Kline was entered by Jenkins Arboretum and took three trophies at the joint flower competition on Mothers Day. See article on Page 4.

## *When forest fire engulfs native azaleas*

A visit to Wayah Bald, burned in November

**By Karel F. Bernady**

A special place, Wayah Bald, was struck by wild fire in November, burning wondrous native rhododendrons. Severe drought in the South during the year provided ample fuel for nature and man to ignite. Numerous forest fires erupted, several in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and at Wayah Bald near Franklin, N.C. With several other rhododendron enthusiasts, I visited these places in March to see the damage and returned to Wayah in June to determine any recovery of the rhododendrons growing there.

On Wayah, fire roared up the eastern slope of the mountain. The flames were intensely hot and destroyed vegetation to the top, consuming sweet azaleas (*Rhododendron arborescens*), flame azaleas (*R. calendulaceum*), rosebays (*R. maximum*) and mountain laurels (*Kalmia latifolia*). A stone tower built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1937 for fire detection suffered complete loss of its wooden roof. Signs indicating the distant mountain peaks were destroyed except for their metal parts and fiberglass cores. Incredibly, the tower acted as a shield and protected the sweet azaleas immediately behind it, and these were in bloom at mid-June. Bushes farther behind were burned but by a less intense fire. Here, recovery of the plants was evident by new shoots coming from their bases and roots.

Azaleas and laurels evolved to survive fire. Wherever

the heat was less severe, new growth sprang from the ground around the bottoms of the shrubs after their stems and branches were killed. Similar new growth developed around the stumps remaining after bushes were cut down to create firebreaks to stop the spread of the conflagration. These plants will survive.

One rhododendron not so fortunate is rosebay. Nearly all the *R. maximum* that burned had no new growth from the ground on my June visit. A rosebay will survive only the weakest of fire around it, which may not damage the plant except for its lowest hanging limbs. Plants with their evergreen foliage intact seem to survive and on occasion a new shoot from the base was seen.

Looking down the mountain at the areas burned revealed idiosyncrasies of forest fires, their randomness and unpredictability. In the largest area of burn an island of green trees many acres in size survives. The flames rapidly passed by it. Mysteriously, the adjacent mountainside to the south had fingers of burned trees surrounded by an untouched green forest, reminiscent in design to the Finger Lakes in New York state. What a devilish artist forest fire becomes.

Farther down the mountain alongside the Appalachian Trail grows a double-flowered flame azalea that my colleagues and I have admired over the years. To prevent spread of the wild

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Truss Show: Michael Martin Mills; Philadelphia. Flower Show: Linda Hartnett

The American Rhododendron Society is a horticultural organization devoted to the genus *Rhododendron* – which includes azaleas. The national society holds conferences, publishes the excellent, full-color quarterly *Journal of the ARS*, and fosters research and conservation. Its website, [www.rhododendron.org](http://www.rhododendron.org), is a trove.

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter gathers eight times a year. Sunday afternoon meetings are held in September, October and January at Morris Arboretum. February through August we are more mobile, with a banquet, plant sale and picnic at various sites. The latest meeting information may be found at [www.GPChapterARS.org](http://www.GPChapterARS.org).

Not already a member? Dues are \$40 per year, which includes chapter and national membership and a *Journal* subscription. Contact the president or treasurer (see above) for a member form or go to [www.GPChapterARS.org](http://www.GPChapterARS.org); click on “Join us.”

## Wayah Bald

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fire, a controlled burn of the leaves and fallen branches was set in the area of the azalea. When visited in March the plant showed damage from the low-intensity fire. New stems an inch in diameter had their bark flaking off near the ground. The larger main stem seemed free of this injury. We are happy to report that the plant was alive in June with flowers on the main stem and new growth from its base.

All is not lost when visiting Wayah Bald. The bald will bloom again in the future. Nearby Wine Spring Bald was free of fire. We enjoyed the many rhododendrons and kalmia in flower there this year. The scent of the sweet azaleas was heavenly. Wayah Bald too will be fragrant once more.



**Above:** A *Rhododendron maximum* in March.

**Right:** A double *R. calendulaceum* that, though damaged, bloomed in June.

**More photos on Page 6**

Karel F. Bernady photos



## Two rhododendron sales not to be missed

Membership has its privileges, and in the second half of the summer ARS membership in the Philadelphia area gets you into two elite, yea rarefied, sales.

The first is the annual District 8 Cutting Exchange and Auction, this year at Jenkins Arboretum on August 13 (this is a change of date from the previously published date). In recent years, this event has experienced a growing emphasis on the auction segment of the afternoon, with choice rhododendrons and other woody plants donated by members and chapters. John Bartlett, owner of Gettysburg Gardens nursery, typically brings a number of uncommon plants that can command a bidding frenzy.

Plant and cutting donors should arrive starting at 1 p.m. The cutting exchange/sale begins at 2:00, followed by the

auction at 2:30, with Karel Bernady wielding the implied gavel. Proceeds benefit national ARS entities

On Sunday, September 10, the monthly meeting of both the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters comes in the form of the Plants for Members sale, at Morris Arboretum. On offer will be rooted cuttings, deciduous seedlings, two-year-old grafts and a few larger plants. All were grown in the Greater Philadelphia propagation program, which is devoted to getting new and hard-to-find cultivars into gardens. Such as yours.

This sale will move quickly – there is a wedding scheduled later in the same space, and the propagation team has a policy of never getting between a wedding party and its venue.

Email reminders for both sales will be circulated about a week in advance.

## New president

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Also elevated at the June 11 gathering was Ron Rabideau, who is the new vice president. Due to unexpired director positions held by Craig and Ron and to further conform to the bylaws, which stipulate overlapping terms of two years for directors, the slate included both one- and two-year director seats, but the overall membership of the board is unchanged from the previous year. See the list of officers and directors on Page 2 for a full rundown of the board through next June.



**Craig Conover**, at the June picnic.

Craig and Kim have for 15 years “worked on taming the 2.7 acres that surround our home. I think the deer and the Wissahickon are winning the battle,” Craig said. They joined our chapter around 2003. “Kim would not let me do any serious gardening until I joined the ARS.” Plus: the Magnolia Society, Conifer Society, Rock Garden Society, PHS, Morris Arboretum, Longwood Gardens and

Winterthur. That was too much, and they’re now focused on the ARS. (The RhodoGravure notes the legacy of Magnolia Society membership, however, for the collection of sweetbay magnolias makes for a particularly fragrant June at their home in the Mount Airy section of Philadelphia.)

For the first time in a number of years, the chapter has an entrepreneurial president. Craig is owner of Sterling Finishing, a finishing and bindery firm serving the graphic arts industry. The firm has had to adapt to the digital age, and now uses traditional equipment to achieve a high quality product. Craig’s industry connections have often come to the aid of ARS Flower Show exhibits via the procurement of materials one can’t find in a typical retail situation.

In addition to admiring the extensive, lush property, visitors of Craig and Kim often note the larger-than-normal

## An ooh-some Flower Show

Visitors and photographers took quite a shine to this year’s ARS exhibit at the Philadelphia Flower Show. Innumerable images with our plants in the background must have ended up on Facebook and the like.

With Holland as the overall theme of the show, the Rhododendron Society focused on Dutch hybrids that have entered American commerce. One of the plants, named for a Dutchman, ‘Vincent van Gogh’, drew many comments, with its distinctive pattern of a white star inside rosy red.

After months of design work, the whole thing came and went in 14 days from setup on March 7 to final removal of plants on March 20. Dozens of folks volunteered their time, with Linda Hartnett shepherding the entire effort: designers, installers, docents and breakdown crew.

**Photos on Page 5**

automobile collection, including three Porsches, their favorite being a 1964 356C.

Craig’s thoughts for the chapter: “Following Kim’s presidency will be a challenge. It was very easy to follow her lead, and it was fun supporting her.

“I have the benefit of a strong and seasoned board of directors. The chapter is in sound financial state. My goal is to put the chapter in a better position as a continuing organization. I hope to see more members joining us at the meetings. We need to encourage more gardeners and novices to join the chapter. There is always room for a neighbor or friend to come to a meeting. It takes an invite to start the process of becoming a member, so I encourage everyone to please ask.

“I also hope that any members who would like transportation to meetings would call a fellow member or me if they need a ride. My cell is 215-901-1034.”

This year’s picnic was at the home of Cathy Keim in Rydal, Pa. The Keim garden has long been one of the standouts among the homes of chapter members and has often been on major tours. With its large number of mature deciduous azaleas, the garden provided the uncommon joy of a June picnic with rhododendrons in bloom.

The Valley Forge Chapter has also had a changing of the guard, with Jerry O’Dell elected president at the chapter’s picnic and annual meeting on June 25. He succeeds Bob Smetana, who served a remarkable six years.

## Calendar

**Important:** If you do not receive this newsletter electronically, you will not receive email reminders a week before events. Please use this calendar to mark your own.

**August 8, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.** Board of Directors meeting. Home of Craig Conover.

**August 13, Sunday, 1 p.m. NEW DATE!** District 8 Cutting Exchange and Auction. Jenkins Arboretum. Article on Page 2.

**September 10, Sunday, 1 p.m.** Greater Philadelphia/Valley Forge meeting: Plants for Members. Morris Arboretum. See article on Page 2.

**October 10, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.** Board of Directors meeting. Home of Craig Conover.

**October 15, Sunday, 1:30 p.m.** Greater Philadelphia Chapter meeting. Morris Arboretum. Speaker: Lois Sheinfeld.

**October 19, Thursday, 7:30 p.m.** Valley Forge Chapter meeting. Jenkins Arboretum. Speaker: W. Robert Stamper.

**November 12, Sunday** Valley Forge Chapter Annual Banquet/Greater Philadelphia meeting. St. David’s Country Club. Speaker: Barbara Boxer, National Arboretum.

**May 21-26, 2018** ARS Annual Convention, Bremen, Germany, with pre- and post-convention tours.

**May 16-19, 2019** ARS Annual Convention, Desmond Hotel, Malvern, Pa.



# Winners at the May flower competition

## Jenkins Arboretum entries receive four trophies

An as-yet-unnamed hybrid created by Howard Kline won three trophies, including Best in Show, at the joint Valley Forge-Greater Philadelphia truss show (cut-flower competition) in May. It was entered by Jenkins Arboretum and also took trophies for Best New Hybrid and Best Azalea.

Azaleas dominated the trophy bench, with only one elepidote winning. It was 'Olin O. Dobbs', a fully hardy West Coast purple from the 1950s, entered by Michael Martin Mills.

Other trophies went to Marc and Susan Thomson for 'Hardy Gardenia' (Best Evergreen Azalea), Mimi Favre for 'Mount St. Helens' (Best Deciduous Azalea), Bob and Chris Smetana for *R. flammeum* (Best Species) and Jenkins Arboretum for most point (Sweepstakes Trophy).

A total of 91 trusses and sprays were entered, and once the judging was complete the Mothers Day throng of Jenkins visitors was able to ogle the display.

Debbie Schmidt served as chair of the show, with judging and clerical assistance from Karel Bernady, Frank Brouse, Mimi Favre, Linda Hartnett, Darlene Henning, Steve Henning, Anne Howe, Eva Jackson, Christa Stamper, W. Robert Stamper, Susan Thomson, Joan Warren and Barbara Winter.

Next year's competition will be at Morris Arboretum on Saturday, May 12, under the auspices of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter. An effort is being launched to integrate the two chapters' lists of prior entries to reduce confusion and instill a higher degree of consistency for future shows.



**Best  
Evergreen  
Azalea:  
'Hardy  
Gardenia'**

Steve Henning  
photo

# *At the Philadelphia Flower Show, March 2017*

**Holland was the theme**, and the ARS exhibit had Dutch hybrids and a presentation indicating the process of propagating them for the American market. A wisp of a hoop house (right) was background for a garden display. The big red is 'The Hon. Jean Marie de Montague.' 'Vincent Van Gogh' was very popular (below, left). Debby Evans was among the all-important groomers (below, right). And the Meyer Trophy was bestowed on the exhibit (bottom).





## *The scene at Wayah Bald*



**Four months** after the November 2016 fire in North Carolina, devastation was everywhere on and near Wayah Bald. Top: *R. arborescens*. Above right: *R. maximum* that was protected from the worst of the flames. Above left: A long-admired double form of *R. calendulaceum*; enough of this plant survived that it produced the flower on Page 2. Bottom left: An *arborescens* that bloomed in June.