

Arboretum Preserving Historic Figures of the American Landscape

ASHEVILLE, NC – A combination of thoughtful planning and fortunate circumstances has ushered in 2015 as an exciting time of growth and preservation for The North Carolina Arboretum. In the coming months, the organization will embark upon projects of historical and contemporary importance that honor the vision and integrity of landscape architecture.

Through the generosity of donors John and Muriel Siddall, the Arboretum will become the site of a full-figure sculpture of Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of American landscape architecture. Olmsted's interest in arboreta and his design process, which addressed ecological, economic, social and aesthetic issues with equal consideration, have made his legacy an important component of The North Carolina Arboretum's development.

Scheduled to be unveiled in late 2015, the sculpture has been commissioned to Zenos Frudakis, an internationally renowned artist based in Pennsylvania. His portfolio of work includes sculptures of many notable figures in history and sports, as well as the internationally significant work entitled "Freedom," located in Philadelphia.

Landscape architect Robert Hayter of LKC Engineering in Pinehurst, North Carolina has been hired to consult on the location and site development of the sculpture. The selected site is at the core of the Arboretum in a space known as the Blue Ridge Court. Within that space is the Johnston Pool, a circular water feature that contains an American Beech at its center. Secured from a Maryland nursery in 1996, the beech has been contained in its concrete pool cylinder "container" for almost 20 years. Although frequently mistaken for a dwarfed form, the tree has only maintained its small size during its decades in the pool by significant annual pruning.

Recent evaluation revealed that it is highly likely that the root system of the tree has escaped its container and rooted into the soil below, thus accounting for the vigorous growth the tree currently exhibits. While this likely deeper rooting has maintained the tree's vigorous growth over the years, it has also increased the difficulty of maintaining its shape. More important, the growth of the escaped root system imperils the tree's long-term sustainability due to the fact that its continued root growth, if left unchecked, will soon eliminate the opportunity to save the tree long term by removing any possibility of future transplanting.

Rather than allowing the tree to follow this passive but ultimately destructive path, the Arboretum is undertaking a careful process of removing the tree from its current location and placing it into training as a future iconic specimen of the Arboretum's bonsai collection.

"Because of its majestic form, impressive age and massive trunk, the beech, if our efforts are successful, will become one of the more significant bonsai specimens in the United States, and certainly one of the largest," according to Arthur Joura, Bonsai Curator at The North Carolina Arboretum.

The NC Arboretum is located next to the Blue Ridge Parkway entrance at Milepost 393. From I-26, take Exit 33 and follow Blue Ridge Parkway signs for two miles to the entrance ramp. Visit www.ncarboretum.org/plan-a-visit for parking fees, property hours and building hours. For general information call (828) 665-2492 or visit www.ncarboretum.org.

As the tree undergoes the transformation from a landscape specimen to a true bonsai specimen in the coming years, the Arboretum will collaborate with local artists and craftspeople to design and fabricate a suitable container for such a large bonsai specimen.

“We are most fortunate to have access to such extraordinary artistry and expertise, both external and internal, in anticipating the inclusion of these two elements in our exhibits,” stated George Briggs, Executive Director of the Arboretum. “Both Olmsted and the American Beech, in their own unique ways, are historic and iconic figures of the American landscape and deserve to be enduring elements of our institution.”

Each year more than 500,000 visitors experience the Arboretum’s gardens, trails, exhibits, shows and expos, educational programs, demonstrations and lectures. The Arboretum’s ability to meet its mission and enrich the visitor experience is made possible by a community of supporters—from members, volunteers and staff to state and local funds, tribute gifts, grants, and community partners.

For more information, please call (828) 665-2492 or visit www.ncarboretum.org. The central mission of The North Carolina Arboretum, an affiliate institution of the 17-campus University of North Carolina system, is to cultivate connections between people and plants.

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