

Raleigh: Where Evergreens Meet Deciduous Magnolias

By: Cheryl Kearns and Mark Weathington

Members of MSI are cordially invited to the 2018 Annual Meeting in Raleigh, North Carolina, scheduled for March 23-25. A post-trip to two major gardens is planned for the 26th while privately-owned gardens and magnolia retail premises will be open March 27-28. Organizers have been busy planning a slate of excellent speakers, tours of gardens featuring a wide diversity of magnolias, and, for the first time, a special educational event. The final banquet will be followed by a fast-paced live auction that you won't want to miss!

Not considered truly "Southern", but certainly not "Northern", either, Raleigh is located "just right", having an enviable climate for growing many magnolias. Geographically located on the eastern edge of the Piedmont, with altitudes of 300-1200 ft (91-366m), Raleigh's climate is agreeable to the six native American species, several Asian, and at least one Mexican species, not to mention myriad cultivars. Here grow deciduous magnolias bred for cold-climate areas as do several of the crosses one would expect in milder climates. Hopefully, visitors will see magnolias in flower along highways and in median strips, in housing developments and at country homes.

Nicknamed the City of Oaks, Raleigh is one city in what is known as the Triangle area, the other two points being Durham and Chapel Hill. The metropolis is home to three major US universities and several smaller ones, hockey and soccer professional league teams and 2 minor league baseball teams, vibrant visual and performing arts communities, first-class museums, and a wide variety of ethnic restaurants, all of which encourage the presence of several major corporations and a diverse, well-educated work force.

Originally known for supporting agricultural crops, NC State University, located in Raleigh, has long had a hand in expanding both the agricultural and horticultural palettes for not just local, but also international sites with its widely recognized research programs. Part of the NC State University campus includes the JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA), named for its founder who was himself an international traveler, collecting plants around the world and trialing them on the grounds he used as a teaching laboratory, then distributing the successes to growers and local gardeners. His goal of enlarging the plant diversity for homeowners continues today and, of course, includes magnolias. We invite you to participate in a colorful and busy weekend!

Educational opportunities

The JC Raulston's Arboretum's mission statement references education. As the host institution for Raleigh 2018, the JCRA will offer a three-part program on propagating magnolias on Friday morning, March 23. Just how do you know when to take pollen, root a cutting or do a graft? These topics will be covered by three instructors, Kevin Parris, Ethan Guthrie and Rich Hesselein, all MSI members who have years of experience with the topic each will cover. People of all levels are invited to come early and learn or improve on a skill. Price and class details will be announced in the meeting package mailed this fall.

After the class, the Board of Directors will meet at the host hotel at 12:30 for their meeting. Members who attend the morning class may want to take this opportunity to explore downtown Raleigh and find the statue of Sir Walter Raleigh on Fayetteville Street. On the wall of a near-by building is a not-to-be-missed "shimmering wall" featuring oak trees, backlit by LED lights from the Raleigh company, Cree, an international innovator in lighting with local headquarters. Or visit the NC Museum of Art and stroll

through the walking trails enhanced by sculptures of all sizes and materials as well as plantings; magnolias greet visitors along the walk from the parking lots to the main entrance.

Meeting details: March 23-25

Once you've experienced an evening meal from one of the varied dining options Raleigh offers, join us for dessert and coffee at a meet-and-greet at 7 p.m. on the Friday evening, March 23. During the social hour, poster presentations will be available, as they will be during the cocktail hours the following two evenings. The Annual Meeting will be called to order at 8, followed by two speakers, Tom Ranney and Andrew Bunting. Tom is a researcher and breeder at the NC State Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center where he works with magnolias, among other genera. Andrew is Past President of MSI and is Chicago Botanic Garden's Assistant Director and Director of Plant Collections.

Among the tours we have scheduled on Saturday and Sunday are visits to two Raleigh institutions whose collections are both overseen by MSI Board of Director members. Mark Weathington will host us at the JC Raulston Arboretum and Aaron Schettler will welcome us to the campus of Meredith College, a private women's college across the street from the JCRA. The JCRA's ten acres feature infrequently seen magnolias such as *M. caveleriei*, *M. tamaulipana*, and *M. maudiae* along with some newer evergreen crosses. The Raulston always has something in bloom. Visitors will find color and fragrance from the collections of magnolias, mahonias and *Prunus mumé* as well as plants in the Winter Garden. At Meredith, a campus full of a wide variety of magnolias strategically located near dormitories, sports fields and an amphitheater should offer lots of color and entice us to wander the campus admiring both evergreen and deciduous varieties. Much of this collection is thanks to a generous grant made by a North Carolina businesswoman, Ruby McSwain, who loved magnolias and promoted education, so it was a win-win gift for her to offer. A pair of old and elegant *Magnolia grandiflora*s grace the end of the driveway onto the main campus. To have two such incredible and complementary collections so close to each other makes it easy for those of us in the region to get our fill of magnolias in one day!

Other visits will include the Sarah P. Duke Gardens in Durham, an integral part of Duke University, where magnificent old Southern magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora*) spread their branches and tempt young and old to sit or climb in them. (Please don't!) We will see other magnolias among the gardens, along with areas such as the Japanese Garden, ponds, the Terrace Gardens, streams bordered by rhododendrons, quiet woodlands and open spaces where Duke University students congregate to play and study and local people bring their families to fling frisbees or admire whatever might be in bloom.

Cape Fear Botanical Garden, a unique garden located near three major US military bases that offers a peaceful and serene setting, was established in 1989 and is located between two rivers. Its focus of building relationships between people and nature brings many school children as well as adults to enjoy the scenic gardens, natural areas and historical buildings. Roger Mercer, a newspaper gardening columnist and magnolia grower, was one of the founders.

The last stop on our weekend jaunts will be a visit to Plant Delights Nursery at Juniper Level Botanic Garden. Over the years, founder Tony Avent has added an impressive number of magnolias to his 38 acres of display gardens, among them his own release, *Magnolia laevifolia* 'Michelle'. Besides viewing spectacular gardens filled with unusual and rare plants in a variety of settings and including several magnolia specimens, we will also have a chance to browse and purchase. Expanded gardens and Tony's numerous and varied beds showcasing plants from all over the world will be a glorious way to end our travels.

Saturday evening's keynote speaker will be Dr. Richard Olsen, Director of the US National Arboretum (USNA), Washington, D.C. Prior to being named Director in 2015, he had been at the USNA since 2006 doing genetic research for an urban tree breeding program and was instrumental in collecting and preserving the USNA's woody germplasm. Generously giving of his time and advice to many public gardens and horticultural organizations, the JC Raulston Arboretum is proud to list Dr. Olsen as a current member of the Board of Advisors, an affiliation closely tying him to NC State University, where he earned both his BSc and his PhD.

Sunday evening will include a silent auction, followed by a live auction after the banquet with Tony Avent reappearing in the capacity as auctioneer. You will want to have a good savings account squirreled away for this event since we already know we will have some mouth-watering temptations.

Although the auction closes the annual meeting, we hope you will be enticed into staying for the next few days' events.

Post-meeting events

On Monday, March 26, we will set out on a day trip to tour two more of the state's premier gardens, one on the campus of High Point University and the other, the Bartlett Tree Research and Arboretum. Jon Roethling, our guide and Curator of the Mariana H. Qubein Arboretum & Botanical Gardens at High Point University, has responsibility for 26 different themed gardens and a tree collection at the university. The arboretum is spread throughout the campus and is continually expanding. Among the primary collections are *Cercis*, *Cornus*, *Crinum*, *Hydrangea*, *Rhododendron*, and *Magnolia*. The Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories and Arboretum, part of the Plant Collection Network-Multi Site Magnolia group, contains the largest collection of magnolias in the US. MSI board member and Bartlett Arboretum Curator Greg Paige will escort us through some of the collections and gardens and discuss some of their research. Along with magnolias, other large collections of oak, rhododendrons and conifers, along with several display gardens, are situated among ponds and gently rolling hills on the 350-acre site. Enjoy lunch overlooking a pond or in the beautifully appointed conference center. Upon our return to Raleigh, dinner will be on your own—another chance to experience a Southern barbecue or Asian cuisine.

If you can prolong your stay to Tuesday and Wednesday, March 27-28, we hope many of you will take the opportunity to visit two private gardens and two nurseries whose owners (also MSI members) have agreed to open these days for magnoliaphiles. The private gardens of members Cheryl Kearns and Tom Krenitsky, in Youngsville and Chatham County, respectively, will show off magnolias and other ornamental specialties while member and nursery owner David Parks will open both sites of his nursery to members.

Cheryl gardens on roughly three acres and enjoys collections of *Magnolia* (over 100), *Acer*, *Viburnum*, *Paeonia* and *Narcissus*, with several other ornamental plants. She has been planting and editing her gardens for over 25 years and has some mature specimens of rare or unusual plants, many acquired in JC Raulston Arboretum plant distributions. Nearly a quarter of the magnolias are from the breeding program of Bill Smith, who was convinced she had plenty of room to trial several for him! Although many have flowered, some will bloom for the first time in 2018, although perhaps after the meeting.

Tom Krenitsky's garden is located in Chatham County, not far from Chapel Hill, NC. The large (83 acres) landscaped garden on rolling hills showcases natural stone outcrops, vistas, a creek, two ponds, statuary, a walled garden and plenty of magnolias. Since Tom is a keen amateur magnolia breeder, you

will see the results of his efforts, including many hybrids with *Magnolia tamaulipana*. Golf carts will be available for those who might not easily explore the place on foot.

Camellia Forest Nursery, already familiar to many MSI members, now has a new sister nursery in Zebulon. Although the primary product in both David Parks's nurseries is camellias, both sites offer far more. The home site is Chapel Hill, where the bigger diversity of plants is housed, including several hard-to-find magnolias along with some crosses bred by Dr. Clifford Parks and other unusual woody plants. The new and ultra-modern location is a few miles northeast of the meeting's host hotel. It is managed by Pat McCracken who is offering a new release, *Magnolia* 'Ruby Star' (*figo* var. *skinneriana* x *figo* var. *crassipes*), a result of a breeding collaboration between the late Bill Smith and Pat. In trialing it, Pat realized it is very shade-tolerant, has a prolific number of scented wine-red flowers, a natural pyramidal shape and is more cold-hardy than *M. figo*. Although the Zebulon site will be primarily a wholesale division of Camellia Forest, the nursery will offer retail sales of a few other plants, especially perennials and woody plants for shady areas. The satellite site will only be open on Tuesday from 8am-12 noon and 1 pm-4pm.

Accommodations

The Double Tree Inn-Brownstone-University will be our host hotel and has agreed to extend rates for those wishing to come early and/or stay later to 3 nights either side of the meeting dates of March 23-25. Breakfast will be included, and all meals during the meeting will be provided. The hotel has been recently renovated and there is a comfortable and roomy lounge area. Since the hotel is located along the street of the main campus of NC State University, several restaurants of various ethnic flavors are within easy walking distance. A short drive away will take guests to other sections of Raleigh.

While some MSI members might have attended the last Raleigh meeting over ten years ago, we are sure you will find many changes and a lot to entice you to return. For those who have never been to a meeting here, you are in for a treat in one of the most horticulturally rich regions of the US. We invite you to sample a wide selection of magnolias—and equally generous hospitality!