

Two October Weekends in Fargo—Groundbreaking (2003) and Dedication (2004) for North Dakota State University’s Arboretum and AHS Historic Daylily Garden

by
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North Dakota State University (NDSU) President Dr. Joseph A. Chapman and his wife Gale invited me to attend NDSU’s fall 2003 homecoming weekend festivities, in particular the groundbreaking ceremony for the new 15-acre arboretum at the northwest corner of 12th Avenue North and 18th Street. Since the NDSU Bison played my alma mater, the University of Nebraska-Omaha Mavericks for the homecoming football game, President Chapman graciously included two football tickets with his invitation.

A new College of Business Administration building and parking lot will occupy the original location of NDSU’s Horticultural Demonstration and Research Plots. Plants growing in the original location that will be relocated to the new arboretum site include NDSU’s AHS Daylily Display Garden, which features the largest public AHS historic daylily collection in the world in addition to a nice modern daylily collection.

Per NDSU Plant Sciences Department Chair Dr. Albert Schreiber’s quote excerpted from the October 8, 2003 issue of Fargo’s newspaper, *The Forum*, “This will be a tremendous addition to NDSU. It will make a nice welcome for visitors coming to campus from Interstate 29. The first thing they’ll see coming over the 12th Avenue overpass will be the NDSU gardens.” *The Forum* goes on to mention that the project’s first phase encompasses annuals, perennials, an iris collection, and the modern and historic daylily collection. Future plans will incorporate a rose garden, turf research plots, and a garden composed of plants native to the Fargo, North Dakota area.

What an exciting celebration! Rich and I arranged to take Friday, October 10th 2003 off work as a travel day, as it’s an 8-hour drive on Interstate 29 from Omaha, Nebraska to Fargo. In South Dakota, we took the Aberdeen exit to fill up with gas and saw a beautiful dog sitting in the driver’s seat of a Ford F-350 pickup. One paw was on the steering wheel while his owner gassed up. The owner told us his dog is a very intelligent Weimaraner who thinks he can drive as he always moves to the driver’s seat whenever his owner fills the truck’s gas tank. Inside the convenience store, two women were engaged in a lively discussion about country music. One of the women said country music always makes her cry, and that the only time she listens to it is when she visits South Dakota.

We arrived uneventfully in Fargo and checked into our motel. We then met Bryce Farnsworth at Red Lobster for a delicious seafood meal.

During the next morning, it rained heavily. Bryce picked us up, which was a good thing, as many of the streets were being blocked off for the Homecoming Parade. Bryce took us to the new arboretum site for the arboretum groundbreaking ceremony, where a large tent had been erected for the speakers and groundbreaking attendees. Region One Web Master and Science Liaison John Becker, who is an NDSU student, met us

there. We had a wonderful time visiting with John. John, who is a gifted photographer, took many photos during the ceremony.

We saw NDSU Vice President for University Relations Keith D. Bjerke and Plant Sciences Department Research Specialist Barbara Laschkewitsch there and exchanged greetings. NDSU Plant Sciences Department Extension Horticulturist Dr. Ronald C. Smith opened the ceremony. He described the arboretum project, pointed out a drawing exhibiting its beautiful design, and commended everyone for their hard work and dedication. Ron introduced Dr. Joseph A. Chapman, who spoke briefly but eloquently. Dr. Chapman introduced Vice President and Dean of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Natural Resources Patricia A. Jensen, J.D., who provided further detail about the arboretum's future plans, including a building that will house an on site classroom, a visitor information area, drinking fountains, and public restroom facilities. After Pat finished speaking, NDSU Alumni Association President John Shotwell said a few words. The groundbreaking ceremony followed. Bryce joined the speakers and others to turn the first earth with golden shovels.

After the groundbreaking ceremony concluded, I visited with Pat and AHS Region One member Jean Johnson. At that time, Jean owned Jean's The Right Plant Place, a nursery specializing in perennials for northern gardens in Perham, Minnesota. Perham is close to Ottertail Lake, which I remember visiting as a child during family fishing trips. Pat invited Jean and I to join her in an ad hoc arboretum advisory committee to exchange ideas and information – we enthusiastically agreed!

After our chat, Barbara, Bryce, John, Rich, and I joined Kay and Jill, who donated their late father Art Jensen's iris collection to NDSU in a walk through the daylily and iris gardens. We had to walk through an area of wet Fargo clay while it was raining heavily to get there. We're all gardening fanatics, because only diehard gardeners would tramp through heavy clay during a downpour in autumn despite the fact that no blooms remained in the garden.

We said our farewells and went our separate ways. Bryce dropped Rich off at the hotel. Rich then drove to the Fargodome to get a parking spot for the upcoming Bison-Mavericks football game. Bryce and I proceeded to FWB Industries, formerly known as Fargo Rubber Stamp, to get information about a commemorative sign for NDSU's historic AHS daylily collection. FWB Industries isn't normally open on Saturday, but Sheri Larson made special arrangements to meet us shortly after the arboretum groundbreaking ceremony. Sheri greeted us with a pot of freshly brewed coffee, which was just what the doctor ordered after a cool, rainy morning.

While there, I fell in love with a bison. I'm not referring to any current or former NDSU students or staff, but to a lovely bison sculpture made from a lightweight tarnish-proof aluminum alloy. I purchased the bison sculpture, which is proudly displayed in my home office as a fond reminder of Fargo and North Dakota State University.

Bison in hand, Bryce and I left with samples and other information for NDSU Plant Sciences Department Chair Dr. Albert Schneider. Bryce dropped me off at the Fargodome where I met Rich for the homecoming football game. I purchased an NDSU sweatshirt that I wore during the game. The Bison annihilated the UNO Mavericks by a score of 34 – 7. Mark Sanders, an NDSU right guard, played an awesome game. Mark is the nephew of Jeff Willer, who is Consulting Services Director for plaNet Consulting, the company I contract for. Jeff, who is an NDSU alumnus, is a former Bison football player. It's a small world!

After the game Rich and I returned to our hotel to freshen up. We later met Bryce and Don for dinner at Guadalajara's, a Mexican restaurant with a full line of authentic entrees, including many seafood choices. Bryce treated us to an excellent meal – thanks, Bryce!

The following morning, Bryce met us at Denny's for breakfast with NDSU Plant Sciences Chair Dr. Albert Schneider. Al had returned from a trip to Tennessee late the previous evening, and we were delighted to have the opportunity to finally meet him in person. During a delicious breakfast, we discussed various types of commemorative signs for the AHS historic daylily collection as well as layout for the sign. Al thought of the fantastic idea of setting the sign atop an angled monument that would rest on the ground. After we finished breakfast, we said goodbye to Al and gave him a copy of our AHS Region One Daylily Pioneer Cookbook as a memento.

We followed Bryce to NDSU, where we toured the potato grading facility and greenhouses. Bryce showed us where the potatoes are stored as well as the grading equipment, and then he gave us four bags of gourmet North Dakota potatoes to take home, including Yukon Gold and Gold Rush, which became mouthwatering mashed potatoes for a follow-up family dinner. The russet potatoes were the very best baked potatoes we've ever eaten!

We went through the greenhouses and saw mass quantities of potatoes in various stages of growth. Rich was first to spot what might be the first-ever ornamental potato cultivar, and he excitedly called us over to look at it. It has something Bryce has never seen in all his years of potato breeding – a bright red central stamen area, which is usually a soft golden orange color. The flowers, which resembled morning glories, were perfectly flat and round in a stunning shade of lavender mauve. Each perfect bloom contained a darker central star-shaped area that in turn was centered with a brilliant emerald green starburst throat. Stems were reddish purple and the healthy compound scalloped leaves were green with a subtle red cast. Plant habit is cascade, which would make this lovely gem perfect for a hanging basket. Bryce marked the potato and showed it to his boss Susie Thompson on the next day, with the result that it's been selected for evaluation. I'm keeping my fingers crossed – if all goes well, this potential future ornamental potato introduction might some day be available at garden centers near you!

I don't think there's anything Bryce Farnsworth can't do. On Friday, October 24, 2003, Bryce became the first non-Canadian to receive the Prairie Garden Award for Excellence for excellence in horticulture from the Prairie Garden Committee during an awards ceremony in Assiniboine Park, Winnipeg, Manitoba – congratulations, Bryce!

All too soon, it was time to leave Fargo to return to Omaha after a fabulously fun groundbreaking celebration weekend.

But wait – there's more! North Dakota State University officials invited me to return as a speaker for the arboretum and historic AHS daylily garden dedication on October 30, 2004. I accepted and flew to Fargo, where I attended Friday night's Harvest Bowl activities along with fellow AHS Region One members and their friends Bryce Farnsworth, Don Martinson, Barbara Laschkewisch, John Becker, Amber Langford, Central North Dakota Daylily Society President Karen Schock, Canadian Prairie Daylily Society President Janice Dehod and her husband John White, and Terrie Mann. At 9:00 am the following morning, I had the honor and privilege of speaking with North NDSU President Dr. Joseph A. Chapman, NDSU Vice President and Dean of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Natural Resources Patricia A. Jensen, J.D., and Central North Dakota Daylily Society President Karen Schock during the NDSU arboretum dedication. Unfortunately heavy rain before and during the weekend forced the dedication ceremony to move indoors to Loftsgard Hall.

As there were no daylilies in bloom and much of the foliage had gone into dormancy, the well-designed layout and beautiful structure of the new arboretum was quite apparent despite the weekend's rain. The enriched soil will grow NDSU's daylilies to their fullest potential. The AHS Historic Daylily Garden sign is gorgeous and visible from quite a distance, as is the plaque acknowledging donors. There is ample room for additional daylilies in both the historic daylily area as well as the area featuring modern daylily cultivars. Both areas combine to comprise NDSU's AHS Display Garden.

Thanks, NDSU, for everything you have done to showcase and highlight the Plant Sciences Department's gardens, especially the AHS Display Garden featuring the largest public historic daylily collection in the world. We appreciate you preserving and sharing these beautiful daylilies in a spectacular setting where they will be cherished and enjoyed for years to come!

Note: This article was published in the Region One *Daylily Pioneer* newsletter.