

Friends of the National Arboretum

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Contact: Janice L. Kaplan (202) 277-5461
JaniceLKaplan@aol.com

FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL ARBORETUM ANNOUNCES MAJOR DONATION

WASHINGTON, DC (February 14, 2011)—A \$1 million donation to Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) will establish an endowment to help preserve the Azalea and Boxwood Collections at the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., the nonprofit organization announced today. FONA will launch a major fundraising campaign this spring to raise the additional \$1 million needed to maintain the treasured collections into the future.

The Azalea Collection has long been a landmark in Washington. The lesser known but nationally recognized Boxwood Collection is the most complete collection in the world.

FONA's announcement coincides with the Arboretum's public statement that it is suspending an earlier decision to eliminate the collections, due to the loss of proceeds from a private trust. A final decision about the future of the collections will be made later this year.

In her announcement, the Arboretum's new director, Colien Hefferan, said: "FONA's efforts in support of the Arboretum pave the way for us to work toward a new, vibrant future for this treasured place." Dr. Hefferan said she is planning to meet with key stakeholders later this spring to discuss the future of the collections. The Arboretum is also soliciting feedback from the public through its Web site.

FONA Board of Directors Chairman Jeanne Connelly applauded the Arboretum's announcement saying: "We are delighted that Dr. Hefferan has listened to the Arboretum's constituents and are heartened by the willingness of the Arboretum's new leadership to engage the public in an open discussion about decisions relating to its collections."

"At the same time," she added, "we are hopeful that funding from this major donation, along with additional support raised in the coming months, will ensure these popular and important collections will be enjoyed by future generations."

Writing Dec. 5 in the *Washington Post*, Connelly and National Bonsai Foundation (NBF) President Felix Laughlin said the Arboretum's decision "to destroy the most frequently visited section of the historic Azalea Collection and dismantle the entire National Boxwood Collection hit a horticultural nerve throughout the region. Countless fans, including members of FONA and

NBF, have expressed opposition to the decision to eliminate one of nature's most magnificent and scientifically important spring displays.”

Horticultural experts and groups including the Azalea Society of America, the American Boxwood Society, the American Daffodil, Hemerocallis and Rhododendron societies, along with Garden Club of America and National Garden Clubs Inc. galvanized community response and led strong opposition to the Arboretum's earlier decision by creating a “Save the Azaleas” Web site and letter-writing campaign.

Major Donation

The \$1 million donation—the largest single donation in FONA's history—was made anonymously by friends in honor of prominent attorney Brendan V. Sullivan Jr. and Lila Sullivan, longtime residents of the Washington area. “This generous donation, offered in the Arboretum's hour of greatest need, reflects not only the donor's passion for this national treasure, but also confidence that the Arboretum leadership will make sound decisions relating to the collections in the future,” said Kathy Horan, executive director of FONA.

“FONA recognizes that these are difficult economic times and all government agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, will face significant budget cuts in the coming years,” added Connelly. “That is why it is important for private partners to step in to protect one of the nation's most valuable treasures and one of Washington, D.C.'s most important green spaces.”

“In the short term, we hope to save the Azalea and Boxwood Collections. Over time, our broader goal is to work with the Arboretum and Department of Agriculture leadership to develop a plan for the long-term sustainability of the Arboretum,” Connelly said. In addition to the azaleas and boxwoods, the Arboretum houses other world-class gardens and collections including the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum and the Asian Collections which form a beautiful garden swath leading to the Anacostia River, as well as the Gotelli conifer collection, Fern Valley native plant collection with shaded paths and wooden walkways that seem a world away from the urban metropolis that surrounds the Arboretum, the two-and-a-half acre National Herb Garden and the Washington Youth Garden.

Located 10 minutes from the U.S. Capitol, the National Arboretum is a U.S. Department of Agriculture research and education facility and a living museum. Admission is free. Founded in 1982, FONA supports research and educational projects at the Arboretum, as well as the gardens and collections. Over the years, FONA, NBF and their members, along with corporate

partners, foundations and other stakeholders, have contributed millions of dollars in support of this 446-acre green space.

Further information is available from FONA, www.fona.org or (202) 544-8733

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For high resolution digital photographs of the Azalea and Boxwood Collections, contact JaniceLKaplan@aol.com.