

MINUTES OF THE ARBORETUM ADVISORY COUNCIL

September 29, 1997

Members Present: Mr. Gordon Bailey, Mrs. Nancy Diedrich, Mrs. Dorothy Johnson, Mrs. Cheryl Knox, Mr. Tom Kroll, Fr. John Kulas, Ms. Janette Monear, Mr. Peter Olin, Mr. Tom Sullivan, Mr. Ron Weinholt, Fr. Paul Schwietz, Chair.

Members Absent: Mr. Gary Deason, Mrs. Sarah Pruett, Mr. Scott May

This was the first meeting of the Arboretum Advisory Council. It was commissioned by Br. Dietrich Reinhart, President of Saint John's University, with the approval of Abbot Timothy Kelly.

The meeting began at 2:00 p.m. in the Dunstan Tucker Room.

1. History of the Arboretum.

There has been talk of an arboretum over the years at Saint John's. In 1984, Fr. Paul wrote a paper investigating some benefits of a Natural Arboretum. The proposal was discussed by various groups, along with a renewed commitment by the monastic community of stewardship of the land. In 1985, Fr. Paul began his tenure as land manager.

The Habitat Restoration Project began in 1987 with the first burn in the oak savanna. The restoration of the prairie, wetlands, and savanna was seen as a necessary step before the institution could move forward with establishing an arboretum.

In 1995 a Task Force was set up to study how an arboretum would fit with the curriculum and natural resources at Saint John's. This group met for a year and defined a mission statement and statement of purpose as well as investigated many related issues. A primary concern was to integrate the land with the institution.

On May 9, 1997 the Arboretum was designated during a ceremony in the oak savanna.

2. Mission Statement.

The mission of Saint John's Arboretum is to celebrate the beauty and values of God's creation through the preservation of indigenous plant and wildlife communities of central Minnesota and introduced plants representative of our Benedictine heritage. Through our sustainable stewardship practices of use and preservation, opportunities for education and spiritual renewal will be provided for present and future generations.

3. Deer Hunt.

- A. Saint John's will open the land for deer hunting this fall for the first time since 1933. It will be a controlled hunt of does only, where 40 hunters are allowed on the property, by permit. The overpopulation of deer has been a problem for many years. Numerous problems have been identified, from deer starving in the winter, to negative impacts on both the flora and other fauna.
- B. Safety is a significant concern. Notifications in local papers, on campus, at trail heads will all occur. Orange vests will be offered to those who want to enter the woods during the hunting on November 8,9, 15,16,17, &18. Security will be monitoring the woods, and ROTC has volunteered to staff the trail heads. Security has identified a plan for protestors as well as an education format.
- C. Hunters will go through an orientation class and must hunt from deer stands.

4. Arboretum Area.

The task force recommended that all 2,480 acres be included in the arboretum. This proposal was accepted by the Abbey's Senior Council. The focus of educational activities though, will be between the current and the old entrance road. This area has a diversity of habitats and is close to campus.

However, there is a significant amount of land outside of this area, with some unique features—such as the bog in the SE corner of the property.

Discussion ensued about the natural habitat and how are the plants representative of the Benedictine heritage. The conifers were mentioned as the primary example of this. The first plantation was established in 1894. The inner campus has a diversity of exotics and native plants. These are part of the cultural history of Saint John's.

5. Integrating the Arboretum into the University curriculum.

There are several classes in the Sciences that use the land for classes and research. Dr. Steve Saupe wrote up this information for the task force. However, our discussion identified that more communication is needed both with departments and regarding research.

6. Education of visiting adults.

Last year we produced the Habitat Restoration Brochure. We are planning to produce an arboretum brochure this year. The members discussed various ways we can help adults: such as providing self-guided tours or offering tours for gardeners—on the use of exotics, cultivars and native plants. Finally, Saint John's has offered workshops on various issues; including managing woodlots, the land, and wildlife. These programs need to be developed further. Saint John's is in a unique position to teach others about the issues of sustainability.

7. Teaching grades K-12

For the past three years we have been offering tours to students in the surrounding area. Most tours are given by students of Saint John's. Last year we had about 2,000 people on these organized tours. Saint John's had been planning to begin Saint Olaf's School Nature Area Project, SNAP, and Natural Science Education for Teachers, NSET programs in 1998, but funding did not come through. Currently we are looking at how to begin the program on a limited basis.

A lively discussion ensued on the education of youth. It was pointed out that the learning experience should connect with in-class curriculum. It was also noted that it is more effective with small children to involve the senses of taste, sight, touch and smell. There are several educational packages already available; i.e. UW-Madison, Twin City Tree Trust and SNAP, etc. One recent trend is that schools have less money for trips so they are going for longer periods of time and spend the day.

Another aspect of this is to provide education for teachers during the summer as continuing education credits. There are state standards to follow. We have the facilities and the ecosystems here. There is money available for the environmental education of children and teachers. (Phillips Petroleum is one example.)

8. Management of the Land.

The land at Saint John's has been managed for around one hundred and thirty years. It is important to realize that we don't have a pristine habitat here, nor is it a preserve. A primary question then is what do we have to offer? There is a diversity of habitats; an forest inventory was completed last year; the DNR has done some work on special habitats, and Dr. Nick Zaczowsky has been inventorying plants on the property. We need to clearly identify what is here for experiments and study. Control or "untouched" areas should also be identified.

9. Funding.

- A. The university has budgeted \$25,000.00 for this fiscal year. It includes beginning several of the tasks of the arboretum. The university could fund some projects, but outside funding is necessary. This has not been clarified yet.
- B. We also have a \$100,000.00 endowment from which six percent of the earnings may be used.
- C. After projects are identified and plans developed, fundraising efforts can begin in earnest.

10. Function of Advisory Council.

The purpose of this group is to guide and advise Fr. Paul Schwietz, in the direction of the development of Saint John's Natural Arboretum. In this process we will be advising both the University and Abbey.

We discussed the probability of eventually devising a structure in which small groups meet and work together on projects: e.g. education, management, experiment. The full council would meet four times during the year to look at our vision and long and short term goals. The Council would advise and approve major directions.

11. Meetings

- A. Regional group meetings are planned to happen before the next full Council meeting. There will be a Twin Cities group, one outstate and one at Saint John's. They will discuss the minutes of the Arboretum Task Force and look at the Council's mission.
- B. The next meeting of the Advisory Council is on December 1, 1997 at 2:00 p.m.

Recorded by Adam Halbur
and Father Paul Schwietz