



Friends of The Frelinghuysen Arboretum

2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

“Building Community Through Horticulture: Engage, Enrich, Educate”

As part of our mission, the Friends supported a variety of initiatives during FY2024-25 at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum, for which the Morris County Park Commission (MCPC) requested our help. These grants included \$4,750 for spring bulbs, \$2,172 for plant sale donations, \$2,400 for educational grants, \$2,235 for an assessment of the Rare Book collection, \$500 for children’s programs; and \$250 for miscellaneous small projects, for a **total of \$12,307**.

In addition to supporting the development of the Frelinghuysen Arboretum, the second part of the Friends’ mission is **support for educational programs** that promote an appreciation for horticulture and the natural world. The Friends sponsored a total of 15 programs through the year (separate from other programs presented by the MCPC), attended by 800 members and non-members. These included programs on botany and horticulture, garden design and history, ecology and the environment, photography and cooking, garden travel, and the Community Garden Conference. This is a diverse offering, designed to complement the programs offered by the MCPC.

The major **fundraising event** for the Friends—the Plant Sale—went off smoothly, thanks to hundreds of hours of planning and work by chair Heather Emelander, plus our many valued volunteers, MCPC staff, and Friends’ staff. The Plant Sale was preceded by two talks from the Master Gardeners, which expanded the educational aspect of the sale. The Friday Member’s Preview was enlivened by music and prosecco, adding to the festive mood. More details about the event appear below.

Income from a second fund-raiser, the **Blackburn Scholarship** Lecture, goes to support students studying horticulture at the County College of Morris (CCM). This important initiative furthers the Friends’ mission of education, encourages young people to engage in horticulture as a career, and supports the CCM’s Landscape and Horticultural Technology program.

The activities described above and below would not be possible without the efforts of the **Friends staff**—Margery Ennist, and Lisa Bencivengo. They manage our operations efficiently

and cheerfully despite the many challenges thrown their way. The Friends are fortunate to have such dedicated staff members. We also appreciate the cooperation of the MCPC education staff headed by Ann Fahey, who coordinates with the Friends on our activities.

Essential to the success of the Friends' mission are the many **volunteers** and dedicated Board members who contribute literally thousands of hours of their time and talents. Three new Board members were welcomed—Marie Saks, Dr. Sandra Picazio Brighthouse, and Christina Wu. Sadly, we noted the passing of long-time Board member and Past President Karen Curry on June 5. She was Co-Chair of the Plant Sale for many years, managed the Library and Rare Book Collection, led the Garden Lovers Book Club, and much more. She will be greatly missed.

Finally, thanks to you, our members, whose loyalty and ongoing support make it possible to further our mission at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum. If you have time, skills, and a love for the Arboretum, please consider how you might contribute to the Friends' endeavors. We welcome your inquiries.

Heather Emelander
President

AWARDS

Members who have given long and distinguished service to the Friends and the Arboretum are honored with awards for their service. Two awards are usually presented annually during a volunteer luncheon, and trees are planted on the grounds of the Arboretum with tags recognizing the honorees. Due to staffing issues at the Arboretum, the garden staff has not been able to devote time to this effort, so no awards were made this year.

BLACKBURN SCHOLARSHIP

The Benjamin C. Blackburn Scholarship lecture was held on February 8, 2025. It was a well-attended talk by renowned photographer Rob Cardillo on the art of garden photography. Beautiful floral arrangements created by volunteers Marge Hulstrunk and Russell Gatzke enhanced the delicious food offered by the hospitality staff for the event. The program was generously sponsored by a \$1,500 donation from Mendham Capital Management. Proceeds from the lecture allowed the Friends to award a scholarship of \$2,000 to Robert Symanski, a deserving student enrolled in the Landscape and Horticulture Program at County College of Morris (CCM). Robert started landscaping in high school and later majored in Landscape Design at CCM. He will transfer to Delaware Valley University in September 2025 to complete a 4-year degree in Landscape Architecture.

The 2025 Philadelphia Flower Show Bus Trip

The ever-popular annual bus trip to Philadelphia on March 4th was a great event. The theme of this year's Flower Show was "Gardens of Tomorrow," helping visitors to envision a future where gardening can help create a healthier planet. The show featured large-scale floral displays, innovative designs, and exhibits from designers and horticulturists around the world.

The Gardeners' Studio included educational presentations, and many terrific vendors were on hand to tempt us with their products for the garden. A bus full of 50 Friends members and guests enjoyed a full and inspiring day.

HOSPITALITY

Heather Emelander coordinated hospitality for several of the larger programs and events, including the members' New Year's party in January 2025, Blackburn Scholarship event in February, and distinguished speaker programs. Lynn Shavelson coordinated the members' Plant Sale Preview party in May. Board members prepared refreshments for the members-only events, and a hardworking crew of volunteers helped set up, serve, and clean up. Marge Hulstrunk and volunteer Russell Gatzke created lovely floral arrangements and table decorations for several events that were much admired. The Friends are fortunate to have such truly talented volunteers to help us host our events and make them memorable!

LIBRARY AND RARE BOOK COLLECTION

The Friends have provided a series of grants to the MCPC for conservation of the Elizabeth Donnell Kay collection of rare botanical and garden books. Under the direction of Melanie Bump, MCPC Curator of Collections and Exhibits, MCPC engaged the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA, Philadelphia) for the treatment and imaging of 18th century cookbooks in the collection. These one-of-a-kind cookbooks encapsulate not only the history of cooking, but also unlock a wealth of botanical knowledge, including the use of plants in treating ailments, their applications in receipts, and documentation of the plants available in that place and time. The treatment and imaging strategy provided by CCAHA safely enabled the manuscripts to be clearly documented to provide more access to scholars in the pursuit of medical botany and the culinary uses of plants during the 18th century.

The Friends' generous support enabled the treatment and imaging of the *Book of Cookery*, which was recommended due to the frequent access requests and the unique reference to the letters from Frederick Prince of Wales, King George, and Queen Caroline in the manuscript. The treatment of the book enabled its safe imaging which will aid us in working to solve the mystery of who owned the book, why the letters are there, and enable a closer look at the botanical references in the receipts.

The Friends continued to raise funds for conservation of the rare book collection through the sale of used garden books from the bookcase in the HEC lobby. Some of the books were deaccessioned from the library; others were donated by individuals and by the Atlantic Visiting Nurse Association, after their rummage sales. A total of \$156 was raised from the book sales during the year.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership services were ably provided by staff member Lisa Bencivengo. Although numbers fluctuated during the year, for the last few years the number of memberships (individual, family, extended family, and above) has remained at approximately 750, meaning

that well over 1,000 people are members of the Friends. Among the benefits of membership are discounted program fees, free member events such as the New Year's party and Plant Sale preview party, free or discounted access to more than 300 American gardens through the American Horticultural Society reciprocal garden program, discounts at retail partner garden centers and nurseries, quarterly newsletters, weekly email updates, and an annual plant dividend.

PLANT SALE

The Friends' Annual Plant Sale fundraiser was held at the arboretum on May 2-4, 2025. Two educational programs took place during April that featured talks by Master Gardeners Grace Tshanakas and Linda Zenkert. On Friday from 4-7 pm, members were invited to a free preview party and sale. Over 200 members registered for this popular event that featured prosecco and light snacks donated by the Plant Sale team. Public shopping hours were 9am – 4 pm on Saturday and 12-4 pm Sunday. The sale featured a huge variety of houseplants, annuals, perennials, shrubs, and trees, with an emphasis on native plant selections. Plant experts are available during the sale to help shoppers find the right plant for their needs. Educational signage provided additional information. Very limited leftovers after the sale closed were offered to volunteers during an aftersale on Monday. Revenue was \$38,350 with expenses of \$22,495 for a net profit of \$15,855. The retail value of the remaining plants donated to the MCPC was \$2,172.

The continuing success of the Sale, both as a fundraiser and a community event, is primarily due to the energy and enthusiasm of over 100 volunteers, many of whom return to support this event every year. Everyone worked well together to make the sale a fun and informative event for both hundreds of Friends and many more members of the public who shopped throughout the weekend. Thanks also to the numerous MCPC employees who provided invaluable support before, during, and after the sale.

PROGRAMS

The MCPC has increased its programming in areas such as basic horticulture, floral arranging, and plant-themed crafts. Accordingly, the Friends search for topics that expand and complement those offerings. In July 2024, botanist Dr. Jon Greenberg led a garden walk at the Arboretum focused on Biblical plants. The first Distinguished Speaker event in September featured Anne 'Dede' Petri, past President of the Garden Club of America and now President and CEO of the Olmsted Network. She spoke about the organization's efforts in protecting, preserving, and restoring Olmsted parks and landscapes across the country.

In November, the annual **Tree Symposium** was presented, with five speakers talking on a variety of topics from trees in landscape design, to grafting, pest problems, and the placement and care of outstanding trees. It was a popular program, attended by 60 people, who enjoyed the opportunity to shop for selections from specialty growers during the program. This is an annual event, given the importance of trees as a focus for the Arboretum. Continuing Education credits were offered for professionals who attended.

Winter (January, February, March) was the busiest quarter for programs, since gardeners are housebound and eager to plan for the upcoming season. **The Community Garden**

Conference in early March is a perennial favorite and was sold out again this year. It is co-sponsored by the Friends and Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Morris County, and organized by Cynthia Triolo. The keynote speaker was Dr. David Robinson, whose topic was New Jersey's changing climate. Other experts discussed the results of vegetable trials, agricultural practices, and recommendations for managing community gardens. Members and coordinators from community gardens across the state attended.

Cooking classes featuring seasonal produce and recipes also attracted a loyal following. Three classes were presented by Cynthia Triolo (a former MCPC staff member), and a fourth by Paul Gatzke on Middle Eastern flavors. We welcome any suggestions from our members for speakers or topics that would be of interest for future programs.

RETAIL PARTNERS

A variety of regional garden centers and other retailers—21 in total—offer discounts and other benefits to members of the Friends. Partners range from garden centers and specialty nurseries to pest control services, a shop offering supplies for wild bird populations, and a few restaurants. We appreciate the continuing cooperation of our retail partners and urge our members to take advantage of these benefits.

WEBMASTER'S REPORT

Ollie Acheson, former Friends Board member, is the Webmaster for the Friends' online presence. The Friends web and computer activities continue to expand.

Website

The Friends' website, <https://www.arboretumfriends.org>, provides the broadest coverage of information about the Friends and activities at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum. The events page is a central source of information for our visitors, plus it enables them to reserve and pay for events online. Detailed information is provided for the Plant Sale as well. Membership information and a donation button are also available.

E-mail Newsletter

Circulation of the weekly email newsletter, prepared by Margery Ennist, continued to climb, growing to nearly 3,500 people. The email "Blast" focuses on upcoming events and includes brief topical articles and photos of flowers currently in bloom. The Blast continues to be quite popular with the subscribers and is obviously a "hit," as can be seen in the burst of on-line event signups on the day following each issue. Subscribe to the E-mail Blast at <https://www.arboretumfriends.org/BlastSubscribe>.

Social Media

The Friends maintain an active presence on Facebook, which is another source of information for our followers. Updates appear coincidentally with each email blast as well as for special items of interest to the public. There are 4,800 followers and 21,00 views in the first half of 2025. <https://www.facebook.com/FrelinghuysenArboretum>.

The Friends also have an active Instagram account with around 1,500 followers. There are regular updates of photos, activities, events, and videos.

The link is: <https://www.instagram.com/friendsoffrelinghuysen>

The Friends maintain a YouTube channel which includes long videos about the arboretum and its history, as well as numerous shorts focusing on single plants or gardens within the arboretum.

The link is: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCwLu6l-05_VnSNQlkvi3Aw.