

# Plant Talk

DECEMBER 2015

by Michael Yanny

## Getting Personal with the Land

— A Review of —

### Where Ecology Meets Economy: Season 3

On September 9th 2015 the Southeast Wisconsin Invasive Species Consortium (SEWISC) and Johnson's Nursery held the 3rd Where Ecology Meets Economy forum at the nursery. The theme of the day was land ethic, which I define as a person's conscientious connection to his or her natural surroundings including: the land, air, water, and all of its associated organisms.

About 115 people attended to hear stories of personal connection to the land from Curt Meine, Kelly Kearns, Matt Millen, Darrel Apps, Roy Diblik, and numerous attendees. We had Landscape Architects, Land Managers, Nursery Operators, Environmental Educators, Plant Breeders, Arborists, State Plant Regulators, Landscape Contractors and other interesting people that mingled into a spicy combination of intellectual gumbo.



Curt Meine

Curt Meine, a conservation biologist and writer, was the first up. He reviewed the history of Wisconsin's land and the people who were instrumental in preserving it. He told about native americans that were pushed from the land as settlement occurred but kept coming back at the risk of being killed because of their strong connection to it. Curt talked

about Increase Lapham, a man instrumental in the start-up of the U. S. Weather service. He was the person who did some of the first formal mapping of Wisconsin. Curt talked about John Muir, the founder of the National Park System in the U. S., who spent his formative years in Wisconsin and attended the University of Wisconsin-

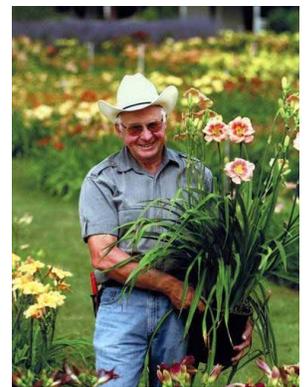


Where Ecology Meets Economy

Madison. Curt showed pictures of John Nolen, the main person responsible for the layout of the city of Madison, Wisconsin with its beautiful parks and public spaces as well as the thoughtful consideration for the lakes that surround it. Curt kidingly pointed out that many of these early leaders of the conservation movement had "incredible beards". His wonderful pictures were proof of that. He spoke about Thomas Chamberlin, Charles Van Hise, Aldo Leopold, Jens Jensen, Gaylord Nelson and many others. His presentation made me feel very proud of my Wisconsin heritage. The take home message I got from Curt's presentation is that the great leaders of their day reacted to the problems facing them at the time. They worked together as best they could and fought for their ideals.

The second part of the program was called the Origin of Land Ethic. This part was designed to try to get the audience to contemplate how land ethic is formed in people. We had three individuals from different disciplines tell their stories of how they personally became connected to the land.

Darrel Apps, a renowned horticulturist and plant breeder, went first. He told about his accomplishments as a conservationist, helping restore and conserve his



Darrel Apps

## *The Trautman Plants cont.*

family's acreage near Wild Rose, Wisconsin. He credited his father with instilling a love for the land in him at an early age through hard work on the family farm including gardening, caring for the animals, and cultivating the land. In particular, Darrel credits Sunday afternoon nature walks with his dad and brothers for influencing his respect for the land. It was at these more relaxed times when Darrel was able to absorb the wisdom of his soft spoken father's words.



*Kelly Kearns*

Next up was Kelly Kearns, the driving force behind the DNR's invasive plants prevention program. There is no questioning her land ethic. It is evident in her daily work. Kelly talked about her upbringing in Indiana. She mentioned a particular tree she liked to climb as a kid.

Everyone in the neighborhood knew it was her tree. She went to college at Purdue and did her undergraduate work under the tutelage of Harrison Flint, a renowned horticulturist. She became interested in native plants while at Purdue and then proceeded to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to undertake her new found passion for studying the natural environment.



*Matt Millen*

Last up in the Origin of Land Ethic part of the program was Matt Millen, a roofing contractor in the Milwaukee area with an avid hobby of land restoration. Matt recently received the Aldo Leopold Restoration award from the Friends of the UW-Arboretum for his outstanding work of restoring his property

Southwest of Madison. Matt told about his upbringing as the son of a roofing contractor. His dad couldn't go on vacations in the summer because of his workload so to compensate his family he bought a property on Pewaukee Lake. This allowed his family to spend the

summers out of the city. These summers had a profound influence on Matt, as he was allowed to run around the area like a wild kid. These summer experiences exposed him to all that nature had to offer. In addition, Matt liked to help in the garden as well as swim in the lake almost daily.

After hearing the three different biographical presentations, I couldn't help but think about what they had in common. I asked myself the question, "What were the aspects of their stories that were in common with each of them that could help explain the origins of land ethic?" I concluded that the most important component was their early involvement with nature as children. They all had a sense of wonder concerning their surroundings. Each of them had people who helped them develop their passion for the land and living things. And surprisingly, all were involved in horticulture through the practice of gardening.



*Roy Diblik*

Finishing off the morning program was Roy Diblik of Northwind Perennial Farm and author of *Know Maintenance*, a book about sustainable landscaping practices. Roy's book explains the need to "know" plants in order to incorporate plant knowledge as the main ingredient to reducing maintenance costs. Roy started

off his program by connecting with the audience in his uniquely personal way. He talked about health—human health—and how everyone strives for it. "No one wants to be sick", he said. He transitioned to plant health and the importance of community for both people and plants. He purposely intertwined human concepts with plant interactions both for audience understanding and because he personally feels the connection. He gets to the heart of what we do as landscapers, namely create environments for people to live in with the plants and the organisms that accompany them. His techniques for installing and maintaining landscapes are non-traditional. From the use of the scuffle hoe regularly after planting, to the way he mows the gardens and

## *The Trautman Plants cont.*

lets the debris lay for mulch each spring, Roy works with a purpose. His effective and efficient use of planting and consideration for maintenance time are uniquely Diblik. Roy showed pictures of several of the jobs he designed and installed—The Lurie Garden in Millennium Park and the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago. He showed the entryway plantings at Mitchell Park Domes in Milwaukee. The pictures were as beautiful as the impressionistic paintings that he said inspires much of his work. Roy is truly an artist of the land. It was a treat to see him perform for us.

The afternoon started with a panel discussion consisting of the morning speakers along with Christa Wollenzein, a landscape architect from the Wisconsin DOT. Kristin Krokowski from UW-Extension in Waukesha moderated the session. Topics covered included: funding invasive species clean-up, prioritizing invasive plant control work, buffer zones to protect natural areas, and the politics of the invasive species issue, among others. The majority of the session was spent discussing how to instill land ethic in future generations of people. Numerous attendees suggested more environmental education in schools. Christa Wollenzein talked about improving parenting by restricting the use of electronic devices by children and encouraging play outdoors. Another gentleman spoke of unsupervised play in nature and how this seems to be a lost activity. Curt Meine chimed in on this discussion saying that he thought it was most important for children to be connected to nature through the heart as well as the mind and that was a critical aspect of developing land ethic in people.

To conclude the day attendees divided up into small groups and went on tours or viewed demonstrations by various staff members of Johnson's Nursery as well as SEWISC. I heard nothing but great comments about the demonstration of Seed Propagation Techniques by Ben French. The President of Johnson's Nursery, Chad Johnson, showed a group how to dig a shrub, B&B, by hand. Carrie Hennessy flitted around on a tour of Butterfly Plants. Jim Reinartz demonstrated invasive weed control techniques. People raved about how good that was. I showed a group around the holding and sales

yard and explained some of the differences in plant quality I see when I look at them. Only a few people left before I was finished. Oh well!

Everyone seemed to enjoy the day. The weather was perfect and as always the mix of attendees from many different disciplines is what truly made the meeting fascinating. All in all, it was a fine day to be at Johnson's Nursery to learn and socialize.



*Jim Reinartz, from the SEWISC board of directors gives attendees an informational demonstration on invasive weed control techniques.*



*Mike Yanny, Senior Propagator tours a group of attendees through the Wisconsin Native Plant houses at Johnson's Nursery.*

### **Plant Talk Available Online**

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