What is Happening at The Arboretum
by Ric Jordan

Change:

As 2012 draws to a close I contemplate the old adage that time does goes by faster as you get older. I’m sure that some of you can explain this concept to me using a combination of philosophy, quantum physics and Einstein's Theory of Relativity however I prefer to sit back and enjoy the changing dynamics of the site, and we have experienced numerous changes over the past year in a variety of areas.

Staffing changes are probably the most significant. Alan Watson stepped down after 20 years as director and is now full time in the School of Environmental Sciences while Bev Healy, our Admin Assistant retired at the end of August. Two of our staff of seven represents considerable change. Jonathan Newman, SES Director, was appointed Interim Director to assess our staffing needs and indications are that early in the new year he will present his recommendations to the Dean of OAC. As with all changes in life staff have experienced a certain level of stress as we await the outcome of his recommendations but change can be good and should be welcomed.

Plant collections and gardens continue to evolve with time. My favourite descriptor of a garden is change. Whether it be seasonal or annual there is always change as this green space matures. New accessions have been added to the World of Trees and Oak Collections to name but two areas. By spring new interpretive signage will have been installed in the Native Trees of Ontario collection. Educational programs continue to evolve as new ones are added, some old ones take a sabbatical, new instructors come on board. Behind the scenes we have moved our plant records system to a new user friendly database called IrisBG. While it is a definite step up from our former system we are still trying to wrap our heads around the terminology used by the developers. For example does localities mean the collection the plant is in or does it mean where we got it from. But it is easier and as a test, I received a request from Sheridan Nurseries, who will be celebrating their 100th anniversary in 2013, and are trying to track down some of the introductions they have released over the years but are no longer in their holdings. I was quite surprised how quickly I was able to produce a print-out of some 200 accessions that we had received from them. They are reviewing the list at present to see if we have any of the plant material they are looking for. One of the modules in IrisBG will allow you to search our on-line data base for specific plants and then with the click of a mouse see where they are located within The Arboretum boundaries. We don’t have a time line for that feature but we are working on the data behind the scenes now so it will be coming to a computer near you.

There have been changes in our volunteers new ones arrive, some retire but all are appreciated for what they bring to the table. Students come and go with each passing year. Some return for a second or third contract. They are fundamental to our operation. They keep us young and up to date and hopefully when they do leave us we have been able to pass on some grain of environmental thinking that will stay with them no matter where their career path takes them.

2013 will arrive and bring more changes, some anticipated and some not! Let’s celebrate them as they arrive and grow together!