

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter July 2006

Next Meeting

Saturday, July 1, at 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall
BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge
MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183

Chapter Business: Show & Tell, Ask The
Expert, and any other relevant or irrelevant
activities, as long as they are interesting.

AM - Lawrence Thomas, *The Contained Alpine*

Lawrence Thomas has spent forty years
gardening on an eleventh-floor terrace on
Manhattan's Upper East Side in New York
City. A self-taught dirt-digger, he has
specialized in the contained alpine –growing
small things in smaller spaces. He will
discuss growing them in pots, troughs, tufa,
and raised beds, where surprisingly, many of
them respond better than when grown in the
open garden.

Lawrence B. Thomas, 340 East 74th St.,
11G, New York, NY 10021, USA Zone 6
Lthomas005@sprintmail.com

Lunch -- BYO. We welcome dessert
contributions. This will be followed by
our plant & seedling sale.

PM – Michael Gehr – Photographing Your Plants

Michael, a member of our Chapter, is going
to show us some of the techniques he uses to
photograph his plants. Many of us have seen
his work over the past few years, and we are
all anxious to learn how to improve our own
photographic techniques.



Chairman's Message – 6/15/06

By Peter F. George

I live in a Greek Revival house, built in
1837, with the classic east/west orientation
common during that period. My office is at
the back of the house, facing south and west,
and I've built a three season enclosed porch
off the back bedroom, which I have
converted to my office, so I can sit and
watch the gardens as I work, and at the end
of the day, watch the day fade out to the
west.

Tonight we had one of those quick and
powerful thunderstorms that arrived with a
sudden clap of thunder and deluged us for
about 20 minutes. It left just as quickly,
leaving behind cool and fresh air, the kind of
air we lust for on New England summer
nights.

I have been spending my days on the phone,
in the garden, on the computer, back in the
garden, eating my lunch in the garden, and
trying as hard as possible to move my entire
life into the garden. It's not going to happen,
but I'm getting at least 4 hours a day
weeding, transplanting, checking on
seedlings, and simply looking at the rewards
of years of work and worry. Today my
Convolvulus boisieri ssp boisieri bloomed
for the first time. It's been 5 years from

seed, and for 3 years it sat in what I thought was a perfect location, and survived. It grew very little vegetatively until this spring, when right after the monsoons it exploded into amazing growth and tripled in size in three weeks. Buds formed, and for the past 6 days, I've had one or two beautiful small sessile white morning glory flowers that open for about 5 hours and then disappear. The foliage is beautiful silver, and the pure white flowers are sometimes difficult to see, but the overall effect is wonderful. I'm amazed that, after 2 years in the seed pot and 3 years growing very little in the open garden, I've finally got this beautiful Turkish morning glory in bloom. It will be interesting to see if I get any seed, and as yet I have observed no insects on the flowers. A few feet away, in another hot area, I've been growing *Salvia caespitosa*, and for exactly the same amount of time as the *Convolvulus*. It too did very little for 3 years, just sort of hanging on, but again, right after the monsoons, it exploded into growth and it too is blooming. A light pink flower, a few at a time sitting an inch or so above the plant, creating a counterpoint to the strong colors of the *Dianthus* and the various composites that are nearby and in full bloom.

I lost one treasure, an *Acantholimon litvinovii*, grown from seed and formerly 12 inches across. It grew rapidly and filled the space I gave it between three fairly large rocks, and the crowding and the rain killed it. I discovered that it needed to be grown in the open, so that the moisture wouldn't be trapped under the plant and between the plant and the rocks. All of my other *Acantholimon*s are doing just fine, and all are growing in open areas, with plenty of gravel under their spiny bodies. Otherwise, it is surprising to me how many of the plants I thought were gone have shown up. *Genista horrida*, a brown and desiccated branch is showing green and growing again.

Campanula thessala, a brown 2-inch stump, suddenly revived two weeks ago, and I now have a full sized plant growing out of the side of that stump. Several *Penstemons* are doing fine after looking rather dead, so I guess the lesson is not to pull stuff out until the Medical Examiner has declared the patient dead. Now who is the Rock Garden Medical Examiner anyway?

One set of less pleasant activities is the removal, or attempted removal to be more accurate, of several rather aggressive plants that found their way into my garden, and are now attempting to take it over for themselves. A *Campanula punctata* in particular, has found the recent monsoons to its liking, and has grown to brobdignagian proportions covering 30 square feet, and expanding via runners that can go on for 2 or 3 feet before reappearing as plants



above ground. I will be destroying them all summer, and perhaps for many summers to come. The message is beware of garden thugs. Get rid of them as soon as you notice them, because every day you let them alone is another day they have to find a way to become permanent in your garden. But enough talk about my gardens. The rest of the summer and fall will be filled with programs worth attending, and I'm hopeful we'll see more of you at the next one on Sat. July 1. Richard May's program was wonderful, and the plants he brought for sale were as good and as varied as any I've ever seen. We need you at the meetings, and I certainly understand and appreciate the variety of things we all can choose from on Saturdays during gardening season, but the meetings have a special value to me, and hopefully to you as well.

Open Garden Invitation!!!

Saturday, August 19th - 1 pm
to 4 pm Open Garden
Elisabeth & Rod Zander
127 North Street
Goshen, CT 06756
860.491.3329

Do-it-yourself gardens in progress for a mid-19th century farmhouse. In the past 6 years, Rod built the front stone walls from boulders on the property, complete with stone arch in the shape of Pi. He split large rectangular pieces off giant boulders for the walkway. He fabricated soapstone and granite troughs, a granite plunge bed and coldframe, and assembled a Janco curved glass greenhouse (and built the soapstone sink and counter plus limestone benches). Rod's current project is a large patio in front of the greenhouse. Elisabeth designed the extensive rock garden in raised beds and the Czech style, filling it with thousands of little gems. She follows the seed collections of the Czechs (Turkey, Mongolian, Italy, Himalayan) and U.S. westerners. She grows as many annuals and bulbs as perennials, from hardy cactus to species paeonies to fill various beds, and has filled many differently styled troughs with plants. She designed iron arches for the perennial garden, and copper ones for the vegetable gardens, which support a variety of vines. Elizabeth's current project is the woodland garden.

Directions: *From Rte 8, take the Torrington Rte 4 exit west up the hill to Goshen. At the Goshen rotary (Rte 4/Rte 63) go north on Rte 63 for 0.25 mile to Ivy Mountain Rd. Park in the church parking lot and walk across the street (North St). The sign reads*



"New England Hearth & Soapstone." Enter through the arch. From Rte 7, take the Cornwall exit onto Rte 4 and go east to the Goshen rotary, then proceed as above.

Staying Busy Gardening

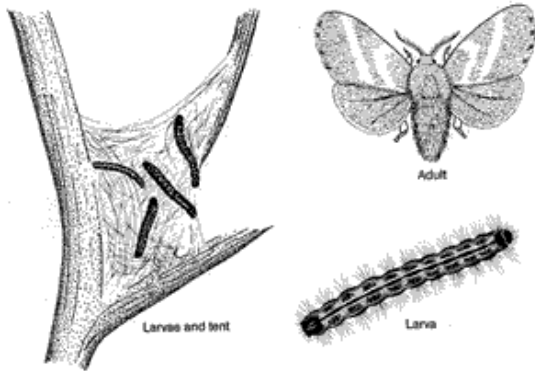
By Dean Evans

I have a lavender and a light blue Aubrieta in my garden besides the one I would now like to describe.

I purchased this plant from Maria Galletti of Alpines Mont Echo in Canada. Its name is *Aubrieta deltoidea 'Leichtlinii'*. Aubrietas are recognized as easy to keep. This plant has the added value of having a wonderful color. It is a very rich burgundy. She calls it crimson pink. I always look for plants that have clarity of color and can be seen across the garden. This gives them additional garden quality. Oftentimes it is not noticeable close up, but when you see them from a distance you'll understand what I mean. Plant colors many times are adulterated by mixing of pigments. The reds and purple pigments will be muddied or dulled if there is an addition of carotene in the petals. This will cause dark blotching or brownish stains. Carotene is present in yellow and orange flowers. The pigment that produces reds and purples is called anthocyanidins. In pure form the colors will jump out at you. I once met a fellow who was an expert on natural pigments derived from plants. He worked for General Foods - he said they were constantly looking for natural dyes to add to food since some people would have severe allergic reactions

to food containing man-made colors. I knew what he meant, having experienced severe itching when I had some frosting containing a commonly used yellow dye. This plant is of such quality that I will order two more next season.

This is starting off to be a very good season for me. I have had excellent seed germination thanks to the abundance of rain. There was an infestation of tent



aterpillars that defoliated large areas of the mountain. I don't know why people don't get out in the early season and burn out as many of these as they can find. But I guess they have other things to do with their time. It's remarkable that entomologists haven't addressed this problem. You hear such things as "Birds don't like how they taste". Why don't they just make them taste better – after all they live in a very confined little tent for a long period of time. It would be easy to inject some flavor while they are in this early stage. The after taste of the good ones would balance the poor taste of their untreated brethren. Luckily we had torrential rains that lasted for a number of weeks. This washed the caterpillars out of the trees and starved them for a time. Such driving them to the ground obviously exposed them to additional perils – wild turkeys or whatever. This infestation was followed by the appearance of a large fly. I knew they existed but had never seen them in such huge numbers. They will not leave you alone – they land on your arm and you

can move you arm while working and they will sit right there. You know that they are going to bite you at some point, but they haven't started as yet. The whole experience is unnerving. It is like a bad omen. The high amount of moisture combined with the heat is producing an abundance of weeds. I have incorporated weeding into my slug and insect pest control program. I use large pot containers, which I set throughout the garden. When I walk through a particular area I add weeds to these containers and compact the contents. At least once a day I add water to the pots. This encourages slugs to crawl in the drain holes of these large pots. On a rotational basis I take a large paper leaf bag and dump the oldest of these filled pots into it. This gives me some empty pots which I then fill with the contents of one or more of the other pots in the garden. When I pull the contents from the pot there are many slugs, earwigs and other multi-leg creatures in the bottom of the pot. These get dumped into the paper bag. Once the bag is full I take it over and shove it in one of my operating outdoor wood stoves that I use for cooking soil. This disposes of huge numbers of insects that obviously, uncontrolled, would destroy my garden. It also cuts down on the use of chemicals, which has to be much healthier. I have upgraded my soil cooking process by adding stoves. I presently have a fleet of five. I am going to add another one this week and scrap one that has become warped and distorted due to having been pushed so hard – I've actually had it cherry red at different times!

When I go out in the morning for breakfast I travel along a very nice road between Brainard and Old Chatham (New York). I have implemented an adopt-a-highway program and I stop along the route and I pick up all the sticks and branches and limbs that have fallen in the right of way. I also use a five-gallon pail and pick up bottles and

papers and such stuff that people have discarded. This gets dumped into the trash container when I get gas. The collected dead wood is used to start my stove when I get home. I don't cut it much- I just stick it in the door and let it hang out. Lengths of tree trunk greater than 4" in diameter get stood up as a teepee and over a period of weeks they dry. Periodically I cut them up with a chain saw into lengths that will fit in my stove. This is the wood that I use to do the bulk of the cooking, but I supplement it with good quality firewood that I cut off my own lands. My cooking program allows me to create the mixes that I desire for the type of plants that I am trying to grow. Some mixes contain a quantity of sifted ash from the stove. Most soils are deficient in potash. In nature often there are fires that burn over areas uncontrolled. This chemical compound obviously helps seeds to germinate and gives plants something they need. Not being a chemist, I am not speaking with any great knowledge, but I like to experiment and have been getting extraordinary results. I have explained in the past how I use large pots (5-7 gallons in size). They are quite heavy when filled with soil, but this huge bulk allows a balance of moisture that the seedlings need. My program is not for the average rock gardener – I can't do things on a small scale and in a sensible way – I always strive for a certain standard. Having failed at growing the plants that I desired, I keep altering my methods until I achieve success. This large pot method or what I refer to as the "double hernia method" has proven successful as I have over 2000 seedlings this year. The problem is what to do with them!

The Garden

By Robin Magowan

Until last fall, I had never grasped the gardeners' infatuation with bulbs, all those

specimens in pots under the glass of an alpine house; or, after bloom, littering the garden with untidy leaves. The few I really like, such as Fritillaries, rarely came back, because I hadn't planted them deep enough, or had stuck them in fatal shade. But last September I obtained a bunch of new offerings from Odyssey Bulbs and Jane McGary--with very specific planting instructions--and these bulbs have transformed my spring garden. Jane has written well on miniatures for troughs and is clearly not put off by a bulb's small size. What counts, rather, is the intensity of the bloom that, in my experience of her offerings, increases the closer it is to the ground. Small bulbs blend with the emerging spring rock garden, with the snowmelt Drabas, Arabis and Saxifrages. And instead of a mostly yellow and white palette, with touches here and there of blue, there are new radiances: the shocking red of a huge tulip resting on the chalice of its leaves; fritillaries from a variety of Greek islands, all the same basic brown ringed with yellow, each smaller, more intense than the next. There has long been a place for Ornithogalums in the woodland garden, alongside late-blooming Trillium and Arisaema. But imagine an early April blooming Ornithogallum that consists of a ring of five flowers nestled on the ground. Captivating and, yes, gorgeous. Then there are the Corydalis: delicate leaves and contrasting hooded blooms that stay around for several weeks. There are even strikingly brilliant



ones, such as the *schanginii ssp. ainae* offered by Janis Ruksans and Odyssey, "clear golden-yellow, purple-tipped "snouts" and twisting, pale pink spurs," as irresistible as it is expensive. It is also somewhat temperamental. I'm hoping that the rock under which I've sheltered it has enough overhang to keep the corm dry through a vole-less summer dormancy.

Last year I allowed my garden to be listed with the Garden Conservancy for its "Open Days" program. Fun for the few hours it was open, but the need to have impact in conspicuous bloom turned the garden into a sprawl, which lasted all summer. This spring I resolved to keep a perspective that would allow the *Asperulas* and other diminutive mat-formers to make their creviced effects. Trees and grasses, we are told, form the backbone of a rock garden. But these elements of structure can distort. On a mountaintop all you see in the way of a tree are clumps of gnarled krumholz, willows



draped around clusters of tiny rocks, or a meadow's *Daphne* made visible by its pink fragrance. Rocks give real structure, but they can also be obstacles, taking space that a succession of plants

might employ. The most useful are the ones that jut over a tilted incline, offering pockets into which I can cram a wet-hating *Helicryssum*, an *Asperula*, a *Draba rigida*. I scoop out whatever soil there is, fill the cavity with gravel and insert the plant, hopefully remembering to douse it. The other planting novelty this year concerns the one year-old crevice garden below my studio's desk window. The soil that went into it is of very rich blackness and most plants react as if they were on steroids. But there are a few plants such as gentians

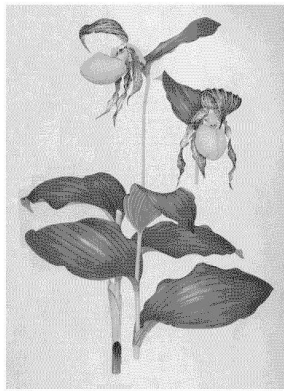
and *Dicentra peregrina* that need the seemingly impossible combination of sun and rich soil that never dries out and I'm hoping they will survive to redeem it. Early spring bloom is not difficult to achieve. In buying plants my emphasis has been on material that will bloom in July and August. But there are suppliers such as Sunscapes in Pueblo, CO., who feature the late summer monsoon-flowering plants from the Southwest. While awaiting them, one can regale oneself with mats, *Dracocephalums*, *Scutellaria* and their like, which look good as they play down and tumble over the concealed rockscape. Even better are the *Silenes* and *Arenaria* and *Paronychia* that shape themselves to each fold of a rock, making a scape more suggested than seen. Equally invaluable are the succulents, retaining soil until the other mats have settled in. Then there are the *Androsaces* of the milk-white variety that thrive on the merest filter of sand. For the six weeks or more of their bloom they turn the garden into a meadow of dots, a perforated curtain through which the weeder peers. Like the succulents they enlarge the planting area, while concealing the rock structure as they reveal it--the perfect combination of plant and earth.

June 3, 2006 Meeting Notes

Peter George called the meeting to order with about 30 people in attendance on a rather cool, rainy day – a pleasant change from the rather hot, humid patch we experienced at the tail end of May. In the true spirit of a volunteer organization, our newest member, Harold Peachey of West End Lake, NY, jumped in head first to fill the position of Greeter. Welcome, Harold, and all the other new members who have joined our group thus far this year.

Show and Tell

Dean Evans brought a plant of *Epigaea repens*, also known as Trailing Arbutus or Mayflower as it is known so well to the residents of the Bay State. It is our state flower. This creeping denizen of rather dryish spots in sparse woods or clearings produces small pale pink flowers in Spring. The flowers may lack in size but their wonderful fragrance more than compensates. Dean has been perfecting a technique for rooting pieces, and he has had success with rooting and growing the small pieces in a sandy loam soil, similar to that in which they grow in the wild. Tom Clark



brought a plant of *Cypripedium kentuckiense*, the Kentucky Lady's Slipper. This hardy orchid is native to, you guessed it, Kentucky, but also other southeastern and south central states as far west as Texas and

Oklahoma. It has the largest flowers of any of the dozen species of *Cypripedium* native to North America. It can be grown in a rich woodland soil in filtered sunlight or partial sun, and is quite hardy despite its more southerly origins.

Our speaker was Richard May of Evermay Nursery in Old Town, Maine. Richard stepped outside of the typical slide lecture format and provided with a sort of extended show and tell. Instead of skimming over a broad range of plants offered in his catalog he chose to focus more intensely on a handful of genera that I think we all consider to be highly desirable garden plants. Among those selected were Meconopsis, Primula,

Lewisia and Gentiana. For each genus he passed around well-grown specimens produced at his nursery and talked as much about how to grow them as how not to kill them! Armed with all this freshly learned knowledge everyone descended onto the sale tables which were richly furnished with a great assortment of healthy and husky plants from Evermay Nursery. Richard's catalog can be found on-line at www.evermaynursery.com.

Thomas E. Clark

GARDEN VISITORS – MID-JUNE

By Anne Spiegel

A few days ago a couple of visitors came to the garden, looked around and said: "I guess we missed the peak." Wow. I was shocked because so many different plants were in bloom.

Earlier that morning I had toured the garden as usual, marveling at how much was in bloom. A yard-wide *Convolvulus compactus* in the lime bed was sheeted with its huge blinding-white flowers. *Convolvulus boisieri*, with its gorgeous silky silvered leaves still had scattered flowers. The foliage on this one is so sensational that when it produces flowers as well your reaction is: "Oh, my goodness, you flower too?" The large heads of rich purple of *Edraianthus tenuifolia* punctuated the garden here and there. A nice contrast was the yellow of *Corydalis lutea* that seems to have become a permanent resident at the base of walls where it gets an extra bit of moisture. (This is basically an extremely dry garden and it is possible to grow all sorts of plants that people with moist gardens might refer to as thugs. *Ranunculus ficaria* and *Asarina procumbens* are also very well

behaved here.) At the base of the lower walls *Dracocephalum argunense*, which has been allowed to seed itself at will, formed a more or less continuous thread of blue purple flowers. This one is wonderfully easy to grow, flowers all summer, seeds itself, and can be moved at any time during the growing season. What more could you want? *Penstemon cobaea*, in this form a rich royal purple with white bee lines, displayed its enormous tubby flowers against an upper wall with the lavender of *Salvia jurisicii* at its feet. These last two are what I think of as distance plants – you don't need to be hunkered down to enjoy them – and in a large garden I think it really works to have some of these plants to lead your eye from one area to another. In the early spring this function is performed by Genistas and Cytisus planted on many levels, which lead your eye all the way to the top of the cliff.

My mystery *Arenaria* splashed its white flowers everywhere. This one seeds itself around willingly and will grow in the screes and even in the experimental gravel garden, which is just that, gravel and



PENSTEMON COBAEA

nothing else, and hosts *Eriogonum umbellatum*, *Penstemon fruticosus*, *Penstemon bracteatus*, and a few *Helianthemums*. The gravel garden is steeply sloped and the gravel is very deep. At the base of the gravel it will be moist way

down even through extreme drought. This is where the *Arenaria* has seeded itself and it has made a wide mat. An *Eriogonum douglasii* lived here quite happily for a number of years and then abruptly died. When I dug it out, the root structure was at least five times the size of the plant – very woody and gnarled and almost three feet

when stretched out. It was such an amazing display that it was left out for a group of rock gardeners who came that day. It was a wonderful visual demonstration of what goes on underground (like an iceberg) and what helps plants to survive very inhospitable conditions. A perfect example in the wild is *Claytonia megarhiza*, which forms a smooth fleshy rosette above ground, ever expanding like a sempervivum on steroids, with each rosette surrounded by flowers, while underground the tap root seeks China. Supposedly a root of this plant was measured at 9' plus. I could believe it. It can be found in unstable large-rocked screes and it would need a really deep root to anchor it.

Back to the garden. *Potentilla davurica mandschurica* was in full flower, hanging its white flowers over the edge of the wall. This is another excellent plant. It stays dwarf (not much over a foot) and will bloom from June until the killing frosts. *Penstemon grandiflorus*, another distance plant, displayed its big pink bells. *Zinnia grandiflora*, at the base of the lime bed was starting its season-long display of yellow flowers. What else?? *Mimulus petraea* (blue), *Silene acaulis* (pink) in full bloom in a trough, mats of *Heterotheca jonesii* (yellow), *Veronica schmidtiana* (purple), *Asperulas* (pink), *Daphne hendersonii* (pink - second bloom – heavy), *Daphne arbuscula* (pink - second bloom – heavy), *Dianthus sp* (pink), *Geranium argenteum* (pink, just starting), *Acantholimon*s (pink) just starting, *Penstemon pinifolius* (both yellow and red varieties), *Helianthemum 'Annabel'* (pink), *Gypsophilas* (white and pink), *Centaurea nigrifimbriata* (blue), *Linum alpinum* (blue), *Linum flavum compactum* (yellow) just starting, *Symphyandra wanneri* (purple) and finally, *Penstemon ambiguus* fully budded (pink buds). That seems to be rather a lot to me and I would call it one of the peaks,

there are so many different ones in a rock garden.

Visitors here are divided into two categories. The first: rock gardeners or plants people. They are very difficult to move along because they stop and look at everything and ask questions about everything – my kind of people, for whom any passionately loved garden is a learning experience and who may sometimes be able to identify a plant whose name tag was lost before you could commit it to memory. They usually go home with divisions or seedlings if the season is right. Too often, they are able to visit only in the late fall or the dead of winter, and I can understand that. I once borrowed a pair of boots so I could tour Marion Jarvie's wonderful Toronto garden when it was under a foot or so of snow while Alex looked out from a window shaking his head. We had a perfectly lovely time and then came in and drank gallons of hot tea..

The second group is: everyone else. A few of them fall under the spell and you have hopes that they may end up being hooked on rock gardens and join NARGS. Some go through the garden at a reasonable pace, enjoy what they see but you know this is an outing and the interest is skin deep. Some love the garden, don't have time to build one themselves but wish they did. Others go through the garden at a good clip, eyes generally focused ahead, not down, and are sorry they missed the peak. These are the ones who need directions to the nearest mass planting of annuals.



Our goal is to propagate choice rock garden, hardy native and unusual dry land plants

from around the world. We grow our plants in Pueblo, CO where winters are cold and dry with only occasional snow cover. Summers are hot and dry with cool nights due to our elevation of 4,795 feet. Our average annual precipitation is less than 12” and often it comes in large doses and ends up as runoff. We are Zone 5 but lately seem to be drifting toward Zone 6. Generally, if it doesn't want to grow here, we don't grow it.

Many of the plants offered in our catalog have low water requirements and can be included among those that thrive in xeriscapes or in scree conditions. Each plant comes labeled with its name, mature size (height [height in flower] x width) and culture requirements. Plants that are appearing in the catalog for the first time are designated **NEW** and those returning from previous years are designated **RENEW**. Some of the plants offered are in limited quantities, but it is our desire to make even a small number of plants available so that they can be observed and appreciated in gardens as soon as possible. Don't forget to order early for best availability. www.sunscapes.net

Upcoming Events

August 12 – Darryl Probst & John Bieber
September 2 – Mark McDonough
October 14 – Jane McGary
November 18 – Annual Luncheon Featuring C. Colston Burrell
For details on these programs, please visit our own website:
www.bnargs.org/Program.htm

Friday, July 21 - Wednesday, July 26 - International Interim Rock Garden Plant Conference at Snowbird, UT
For details on this event, please check <http://www.nargs.org/IIRGPC.html>

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Peter F. George
Vice-Chairperson – Dean Evans
Secretary – Norma Abel
Treasurer – Jeffrey Hurtig
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson – Dean Evans
Greeter – Harold Peachey
Independent Director – Elizabeth Zander
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George
Meeting Recorder – Tom Clark
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel
Program Chairperson – Robin Magowan
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Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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Please contact editor before reprinting
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