

OHA Convention 2019

Deep in the heart of Texas? No, but deep in the HEAT of Southern Ontario “Where Everything Grows”

This year’s Ontario Horticultural Association conference was held in Windsor Ontario. I think we picked the hottest weekend of the summer to be there but it was a spectacular location. Every room had a view of the beautiful Detroit River and amazing gardens along the waterfront on the Canadian side of the river. Approximately 200 Association members attended the conference from every District in Ontario. 4 of us attended from OMHS. Each of us will be submitting an article on our experience there.

For me, it was my first conference. The conference started on Friday morning and unfortunately, we didn’t arrive in time to hear the morning speaker or attend the workshops. We did arrive in time for the evening themed dinner. The teaser for the event was “perhaps a surprise visit from Al Capone” and the attendees dressed for the occasion! We were back in the era of the roaring ’20s and there was an amazing collection of flapper dresses and zoot suits. There was quite an array of headbands, the precursor to today’s fascinators. The evening entertainment was a group called The Rum Runners, who gave us a taste of the music playing in the popular “Speakeasies” of that era. Apparently, the Speakeasies were named so because during prohibition you have to speak quietly about places that sold alcohol so as not to alert neighbours and police.

The conference schedule is a busy one with not much chance for any downtime. Saturday morning was a business meeting that concluded with a keynote speaker on the booming Greenhouse Industry in the Leamington area of Ontario (Val Gillespie will be writing about that one). It was fascinating and sparked an interest to take a tour of the area greenhouses some day. A quick bite to eat and then off to either workshops or tours. Somewhere in between we found time to view the many entries into the flower show and other competitions. There are some very talented people in all the OHA Districts.

Saturday afternoon we went out on tour to a lavender farm/winery followed by a visit to a local artisans garden. The lavender farm was called Serenity Lavender and the Winery, North 42 Winery, which is on the 42nd parallel (equivalent climate to the border of California and Oregon). Wondering about the combination of Winery and Lavender Farm? New grape vines take 5 years to be ready for use in the production of wine, so while the owners were bidding their time they decided to get into Lavender

production.

Unfortunately Lavender has to be picked when it is ready and nature doesn't wait for a Horticultural tour. The fields had been harvested the week prior to our visit. Also due to lack of insulating snow the last few winters they had lost quite a lot of their plants. We learned about their 2 types of Lavender- English, and French (neither of which are from England or France) and how they are used for culinary purposes as well as essential oils. They have over 40 varieties of Lavender. We learned when to pick the flowers for their essential oils as well as how to trim the Lavender into a compact plant at the end of the growing season. I am sure we could have learned more but the mid 30-degree temperatures and high humidity drove us all into the Winery for some refreshing wine tasting and shopping for lavender products.

Next on our tour was a visit to a local artists garden and gallery. The property consisted of a home built on 3 acres as with a stream that feeds into Lake Erie. The stream originally was very overgrown and spring runoff was flooding the area and undercutting the edges of the stream. The plentiful trees on the property consist of black walnut, maples, and oak. A few years after purchasing the property they decided to reroute the stream. They installed 5 waterfalls and collected many tons of large boulders from the farm across the road, to hold back the river banks. The waterfalls slow the spring runoff torrent of water.

In the garden are many unique places for visiting artists to sit and enjoy the gardens. The artist's husband has a large workshop on the property where he does woodworking and creates live edge tables and charcuterie boards. Most of the logs that delivered to him are large trees cut down by Ontario Hydro due to hydro issues. There are many leftover large tree pieces scattered around the garden.

The garden plants were too numerous to write down but much of the garden consisted of many varieties of Hostas, water iris, hydrangeas, and numerous shrubs. There was a gazebo made out of an old satellite dish that was covered in wild honeysuckle. Many of the Hostas planted on the new embankment were only growing in 3" of soil. The owner had a vegetable garden strategically planted to capture one of the few sunny spots on the property and in addition to many vegetables, her 4 Marijuana plants were thriving.

I marvelled at the size and complexity of the garden that the artist and her husband had been able to create and maintain! It was calling out to us to just sit and enjoy. We also had a chance to tour her air-conditioned studio where she teaches and paints.

From a conference business perspective, I found it most useful to meet people from other societies and to hear how they run meetings, plant sales, membership drives, speakers, etc. I also was interested in the structure of how the AGM was run as they had to review and get approval for 40 bylaw changes. With the exception of 2 bylaw changes where discussion ensued, all went very quickly. Kudos to the OHA VP who spearheaded that effort and who was a master at Roberts Rules of Order.

I would encourage anyone to attend the conference. It was educational, fun, well attended and well run. Next year will be a little closer to home in London Ontario.

Karen Baldock

Vice President

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