

# The Pine Hollow Arboretum

BY JANET L. TANGUAY

“Come to my garden and fall in love with the sky and the air and all that is there.”

This starts a poem written by retired pediatrician and arborist, Dr. John Abbuhl, about one of his greatest passions - The Pine Hollow Arboretum in Slingerlands, a collection of trees and shrubs arranged esthetically in a natural setting. The collection contains 3,100 plants from the temperate climates of the world and represents the horticultural potential of our own climate.

This living museum where trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants are cultivated for scientific and educational purposes is where Dr. Abbuhl began planting on 14 acres of land, which has now expanded to 20 acres.

Dr. Abbuhl grew up in Cropseyville and later moved to Slingerlands and started his project as a hobbyist. What turned into a lifelong passion for plants started in the spring of 1966 as a landscaping project.

“When I first started I had no intention of building an arboretum, I was just hoping to do a little landscaping and build a pond,” he said.

Built on very fertile soil, this land now has a collection of every fir in the world (90 firs and over 30 species of firs), two dozen spruces, a magnolia field, Japanese weeping Fuji cherry trees, Mexican

spruce trees, Chinese Yulan lily trees, Japanese umbrella pine, Pawpaw trees, a metasequoia field, an azalea field, Korean philodendrons, multiple beautiful ponds and benches to sit and contemplate life. In 1941, not one tree rose above the roofline of Dr. Abbuhl's house. Today, you can find a white pine over 100 feet tall that is expected to live 350 years.

Dr. Abbuhl explained that when trees are allowed to grow to their full potential they begin to reproduce naturally. Typically, when trees fall down or leaves fall to the ground, we clear them away. In this environment that supports natural fauna and flora, seeds that fall to the ground and are left untouched sprout up new life. Logs that are not picked up begin to take on a unique character of their own. On a walk around the grounds, you might also spot wildlife such as turkeys, fox, deer, bullfrogs, coy fish, muskrats, ducks, great blue heron and geese.

What is the secret to planting thousands of thriving plants and trees? “Persistence,” he said, “and a willingness to try things and lose. I plant 100 new plants every spring. Sometimes I'm surprised and we have a mild winter and things that should not live in the climate here somehow survive.”

Many of the plants that Dr. Abbuhl has purchased are from Oregon-based mail order nursery Forest Farm ([www.forestfarm.com](http://www.forestfarm.com)).

“For me, going on this site is like being a kid in a candy store,” he admitted. In a quick visit to the site, you can find ferns, hardy palms, fruit plants, perennials, bamboo, grasses, woody trees, shrubs and pines.

#### There are six ways an arboretum is formed:

1. Wealthy estates leave an endowment of land.
2. A college campus might run one.
3. Public parks take responsibility for maintaining them (such as the Golden Gate in San Francisco).
4. Cemeteries (such as Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, MA).
5. Community activists and donations (such as the Tower Arboretum).
6. Hobbyists build one.

The Pine Hollow Arboretum uses volunteers to mow lawns, weed, meet and greet guests or perhaps take care of a specific area. “Volunteers are always needed,” said Dr. Abbuhl. “If you like plants or want to learn more about plants, this is the place to volunteer.”

There is also a house on-site complete with a kitchen, office, bedroom, living area and patio for

entertaining small group that is available for daily rental.

The Pine Hollow Arboretum is open 7 days/week from 10am to 4pm. The public is welcome anytime by appointment. All schoolchildren get in for free. Art shows, poetry readings and plant sales are just a few of the activities that Dr. Abbuhl has encouraged in the past and would like to see more of in the future. The best way to enjoy the experience is to call ahead for a tour at 439.6472.

*Come to my garden  
and find each nook;  
The one with the grass,  
the one with the brook.*

*Come to my garden  
at the end of the day  
and see if another  
might come that way.*

*Look for the trees  
That whisper in breeze.  
Look for the bark  
that is old and dark.*

*Find the still water  
the rushes do hide.  
There is a bull frog  
with mighty big eyes.*

*Smell the sweet fragrance  
still in the air.  
It comes from the blossoms  
just over there.*

*Hear the melodious  
song of the thrush  
just as the shadows  
tell us it's dusk.*

*Then comes the stranger  
You know he's a friend,  
because he came here  
when time was to spend.*

—Dr. John Abbuhl

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