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**CWGS Annual Meeting
and Elections will be held
September 15 in Gates
Hall, DBG**

**Proposed Slate for
Elections is posted on
page 3**

Online at:
www.colowatergardensociety.org

Celebrating Joe!

The Professional, if accidental, Water Gardener

by Bill Powell

Joe Tomocik, who retired recently as Curator of Water Gardens at Denver Botanic Gardens, came to the job almost accidentally. Joe had already begun developing a number of skills that, looking back now, might have suggested a career in aquatics. (As anyone who knows him even slightly will tell you, Joe has always loved to fish!) And he had been a teacher with interests in the natural sciences. But, it was chance that led Joe to DBG, and even then he wasn't involved in water gardening until ambition in another area caused his supervisor to suggest he take over the ponds instead.

When Joe left teaching in the Midwest and moved to Denver in the '70's, he was unsure of what he might try next. Teaching had been rewarding, but tiring, and Joe wanted a break. He interviewed with Denver City/County government. They offered several possible placements. One was for seasonal work at the Denver Zoo. That summer grew into eight years as a member of the grounds department.

(continued on page 7)

September 15 Party to celebrate Joe's accomplishments

Please join us the evening of Thursday, September 15 to celebrate Joe Tomocik's contributions to water gardening both internationally and locally.

At 6:00 pm, CWGS will host a pot-luck dinner in Gates Hall at Denver Botanic Gardens. The Club will provide beverage, table set-ups, an entrée (ham), and desserts. Guests are asked to bring a side dish, salad, or appetizer to share. Joe and his family will be joining us for the festivities, as will some of the Gardens' staff.

All Club members are welcome and encouraged to join us. We'll have great food and no doubt share a few memories of good times and the occasional water gardening calamity... like the time that hail stripped the leaves from the waterlilies - the day before the international Symposium opened at the Gardens!

Denver Botanic Gardens will still be on its summer hours (9 am to 9 pm) the evening of September 15. To gain entry to the Club's meeting and dinner party, please park in the public garage between York and Josephine Streets and enter via the visitor's center. If you are not a member of DBG, please tell the admissions staff that you are attending the CWGS meeting and Joe Tomocik's retirement party. You should be admitted without paying. Gates Hall is at the left rear of the lobby court in the main building.

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CWGS Treasurer's Report:
Balance as of August 31
\$12,136.96

Need to join or renew?...
... The application is on page 9

Does CWGS have your current email address? If you're not sure, contact us.

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Last President's Letter

by Vicki Aber

As I write this I have just returned from our last pond-side meeting. It was a wonderful afternoon at Ben and Olga Coleman's home. The weather couldn't have been better. After so much heat, it was overcast and cooler. We were treated to rides in the boat (I hope the boat wasn't too damaged when we ran aground), views of beautiful Gaynor Lake and even more beautiful grounds around the Coleman home. The barbeque and pot luck were tasty and the relaxing chat among members was treasured. Thank you so much, Ben and Olga, for hosting us. We *did* have to forgo the promised S'mores because of the rain; maybe another time.

It has been an interesting pond year. Colorado weather as always presents us with new challenges, but on the whole my pond faired pretty well. I hope that is true for the rest of you.

The Club has also been presented with challenges and rewards. Joe Tomocik, a founding member of CWGS and curator at DBG, is retiring. We will miss his hand on the water features at DBG. Hopefully he won't be a complete stranger and he'll come to some CWGS meetings and events in the future. We will hold a retirement party for Joe at our next meeting Thursday, Sept. 15. (See the articles on the front page for details.) Be sure to come and help us honor him and relive good times.

We'll also hold Club elections on the 15th. Each year half of the Board of Trustees and Officers of the society are elected. These are the people who decide what the club will look like. Our current board and officers are amazing. Everyone chips in and we have a really great time. We have some openings on the Board and would really like some new faces and new ideas. (The proposed 2012 Election Slate is shown below, along with the half of the Board that is not up for election.)

Most urgently, we need a president. As I mentioned in last month's president's letter, the Club has term limits of two terms of two years each for each officer's position. I have been president for four years now. It has been a great experience and I wouldn't trade it for anything. It is now time for someone else to have this opportunity.

I wasn't thrilled when I got talked into running for president and thought anybody could probably do a better job. After a short time I found it really isn't that hard and actually quite fun. I am willing to take over the vacant V.P. position or if someone would like to do that, a Member-at-Large position. I'm not willing to leave the Board entirely; I have too many great friends on the Board!

Hope to see everyone at the September meeting and party for Joe. And I hope you'll consider becoming more involved in the club; you won't regret it.

Vicki Aber

Soon-to-be-Past President

CWGS Board of Directors Election Slate for 2012

The following positions are up for election

Note: The following positions will continue through 2012

President	open	Vice President	open
Treasurer	Jim Wohlenhaus	Secretary	Dorothy Martinez
MAL 1	Lynn Jewett	MAL 2	Jim Arneill
MAL 3	open	MAL 4	Bill Powell
MAL 5	Brenda Parsons-Hier	MAL 6	Marge Oleson
MAL 7	Peter Hier	MAL 8	Michael Weber
MAL 9	open		

Elections will be held during the September 15 "Annual Meeting" in Gates Hall, DBG. The Annual Meeting will be convened following the pot-luck dinner and before the presentations to Joe Tomocik. The dinner begins at 6:00 PM.

Members in bold font above/left are standing for election to the positions noted. The President's position and MAL (Member At Large) positions 3 and 9 have no candidates as of this writing. All positions in bold are open for nomination from the floor during the meeting. All Members are encouraged to attend and participate in the elections.



Club members relax beside Ben and Olga Coleman's dry riverbed that links their ponds. Ben has also begun to plant the adjacent lake with lilies. (Lake is in upper right corner of photo.)

Waterside at Ben and Olga's

The Club's trip to the Coleman's lakeside home near Longmont enjoyed surprisingly cool weather and even a light shower that arrived on cue, just at the end of a delightful afternoon. Our thanks to Ben and Olga for their hospitality and for organizing and supplying the cookout as well as some home-brewed beer!

And, thanks to all the members who brought appetizers, sides, and desserts. It was a feast... even without S'mores. (Fireside S'mores are Ben's favorite end to pondside parties.)

We ate, chatted, and boated - multiple times. The more energetic even swam! And, we got to admire Ben's imaginative dry "river" of ponds and his latest venture - planting of the adjacent lake margins with lilies. Some of Ben's plantings have been eaten by muskrats, and the open water of the lake is a challenge. Waves kicked up by winds and passing boats knock the waterlilies around, but they've survived and were in bloom. In a temporary holding pen at the edge of the lake Ben has collected a large number of lilies recently rescued from Berkeley Lake in Denver. Accustomed to open expanses as these lilies are, they should naturalize quite easily in the mud bottom of Lake Gaynor... That IS if Ben can just keep those pesky muskrats at bay.



The public learns about conservation and carnivorous plants during DBG free days. The interactive exhibit includes Venus fly traps that people can trigger to close.

We Don't Bite

...but our plants might

For the last few years, CWGS members have helped to staff the carnivorous plant display and information booth during free days at Denver Botanic Gardens. Just recently these free-day displays resumed following a summer hiatus. Two more free-day displays are planned during September and October.

For those of you who may not be familiar with free days at the Gardens, in order for local cultural institutions to receive operations money from a metropolitan SCFD (Scientific and Cultural Facilities District) fund, they must provide free admission days to the public throughout the year. Denver Botanic Gardens is only one of several institutions to participate in the SCFD program. The Denver Art Museum and the Denver Zoo also benefit, as do several other facilities. This overlay funding, derived from a regional sales and use tax, supplants direct financial support from the city.

Free days at DBG provide a special opportunity to widen the horizons of the public, particularly for those who could not afford to visit the Gardens otherwise. To enhance these visitors' experience, the Gardens' Education Department and Curator Joe Tomocik conceived the idea of staffing an interactive display, which would allow people to see, and even touch, carnivorous plants. The display has proved very popular - particularly with children who are fascinated with the idea of plants that "bite back."

If you share an interest in conservation of the unusual and enjoy working with the public, especially children, why don't you join us at the next free-day carnivorous plant display. You don't need to have detailed knowledge of carnivorous plants. We have lots of printed information. You'd be joining experienced staffers, and, after all, the display is all about education. Join us, learn as you help, and enjoy the grateful response of lots of eager faces. To volunteer, or to learn more about the free day carnivorous display at DBG, contact Brenda Parsons-Hier (303) 278-2106.



Death in the wind

by Bill Powell

The growing season brings rewards, but it also invites tragedy. Luxuriant summer growth attracts insects and blights that may also attract the attention of homeowners focused on solving these problems threatening their landscape. Often a homeowner's first thought is to apply agri-chemicals. Unfortunately, a chemical response sometimes has unintended, and deadly, consequences.

A couple of weeks ago CWGS Board member Michael Weber wrote, *"I am sorry to report that I have had a major chemical kill of all my fish. Services were held this AM. This was the result of my neighbor spraying trees yesterday."* Those of you who recall having admired Michael and Sandy's pond a couple of summers ago when the pond tour picnic was held there will appreciate the great loss.

It's not as though Michael's neighbor was irresponsible. The neighbor employed a professional service that was presumably familiar with the product they applied, but the service was unaware of what lay on the other side of the fence. Michael said the applicator was *"very forthcoming about taking responsibility..."* after the fact, and that *"...the neighbors are excellent people and will be horrified when they return from work."* Still, impact from insecticide application is so swift that its effects are hard to mitigate even if caught early and, of course, a complete die-off can't be undone.

Insecticides and other garden treatments may pose less problem for people with reflecting pools or for gardeners whose ponds are devoted to growing plants only, but many water gardeners also keep fish, and fish are very sensitive to environmental pollution from chemical agents. Aerosol sprays are particularly dangerous in that the active agent, often a pesticide or insecticide toxic to fish and other marine life, is suspended in a fine mist that can be carried long distances, moving over backyard fences and hedgerows, and settling invisibly.

Fish may be particularly vulnerable, but sadly, not only fish are affected. Sometimes four-legged pets suffer as well. Writing this article, I thought to check with Club member Gabriella Bertlemann who earlier in the year had experienced repeated loss of fish following periods of heavy rain. She and I had suspected overland transport of lawn chemicals might have contributed to the fish loss. Although Gabriella never completely unraveled the mystery, she's had several more recent incidents of possible environmental poisoning. Street maintenance left a distinct oil/tar odor that hung in the air for days. Then a neighbor contracted with a landscape truck that involved "environmental" spraying. Gabriella spoke with the driver and made her aware of the pond. This time, though, it may have been Gabriella's cat that suffered the consequences. Clive, Gabriella's 4-year old Siamese cat *"fell ill and, according to the vet and emergency clinic, sustained serious kidney failure. He struggled for 4 long days/nights and died last week."*

Gabriella writes, *"I think (hope) people might actually care if their level of awareness were present. I have never sprayed a thing in my yard, as my cats always nibbled on the grass and I care about the birds, butterflies, bees and wildlife. There are alternative means, but the commercial companies don't employ them, of course. In this case they say it contains natural ingredients "such as agave", but the odour of the spray betrays the "natural theme". An aquarist told me 20 years ago 'what gets in the air gets in the water'. It's true."*

Gabriella's point is well taken. Just because the source of a compound may be natural or organic, doesn't mean that it's not toxic to more than just the vector toward which it's directed. The safest policy is to avoid, or severely limit, environmental sprays and applications. But what if the survival of a plant is at stake? I admit that I've sprayed oils on our red oak and our cedars to prevent two separate blights from defoliating and killing the plants. Application was not without risk both to my pond and pets.

Dorothy Martinez, another Board member, faced a similar conundrum. Should she spray her pines and spruces to discourage pine beetle infestation? She writes, *"Unfortunately, living so close to the mountains, I have to spray my pines and spruces twice a year to keep the pine beetle and other pests from killing them. The spray is very toxic to aquatic life. Every time my tree service comes to spray the trees, I cover the pond, waterfall, and wetlands area with tarps. My neighbor has been very conscientious about spraying his trees and always lets me know when he is scheduled to have his trees sprayed - he even helped me cover the ponds last spring."*

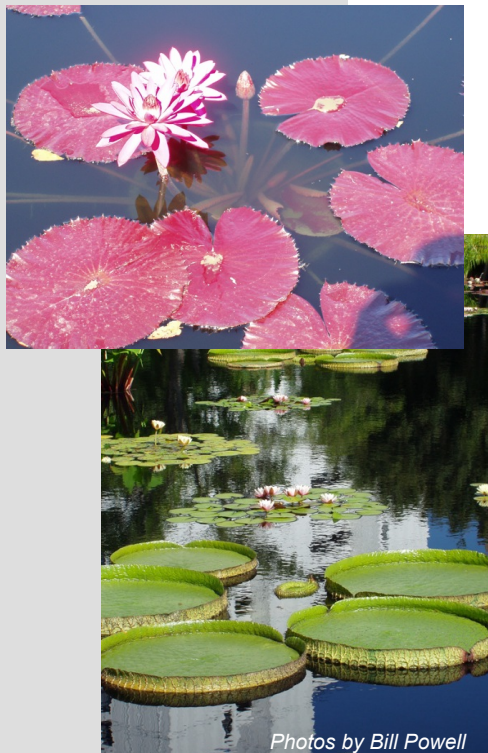
Sharing information with your neighbors about the uses and dangers of insecticides and lawn chemicals is probably the best defense against environmental poisoning. But what should you do once the damage is done? Aerosol sprays are usually very volatile and their presence in the pond, while deadly, is fleeting. Once you remove the dead fish, natural biologic processes will probably clean the water rather quickly, although you might want to undertake some water changes before introducing fish. And when you do re-introduce fish it might be best to do so incrementally, using a few small, inexpensive gold fish fry, rather than larger Koi.

Other agri-chemicals that find their way into your pond via runoff from adjacent soils or pavement may be more persistent in their toxicity. But testing is expensive and often inconclusive. Probably the best protection is to maintain a no-application zone for 10 or 20 feet around your pond and to be sure that ground water is diverted from entering the pond.



Top: Jim Arneill leads a tour of the ponds at DBG.

Bottom: Doris Freestone talks about the Gardens' tropical waterlily program.



Photos by Bill Powell



WBF 2011:

...extravagant blooms, sparkling water, and an interesting program.

By Bill Powell

The 2011 Water Blossom Festival at DBG drew attention to the Gardens' aquatic displays and the Club's mission to educate and inform about water gardening along the front range. For several hours one recent Saturday, Club members staffed our educational booth near the Garden's Monet Pond. We answered questions, distributed informational brochures, and conducted tours of the Gardens' many water gardens. Jim Arneill, a Club member and DBG docent, even conducted a peek into DBG's new greenhouse facility.

Dan Johnson, DBG's Curator of Native Plants combined his love of native, dry land plants, with his appreciation of water in a video presentation about "Oasis Gardening." Over the years Dan has traveled to gardens through the southwest, collecting photos and ideas for ways he might capture the allure of water in even the driest garden. He shared his finds with us, showing us unique water features that exploit very little water for maximum effect.

Dan's program included a disc-shaped plaza garden with a small disappearing fountain at its center. The water coming from the fountain was small, but its impact was greatly expanded through radiating water-like ribbons of shadow cast from an overhead pergola constructed of native ocotillo branches. Another garden had a small reflecting pool recessed into one end near a wall of evergreens. The water was easy to miss, except that a shell-shaped reflector had been constructed behind the pool. The shell was covered in glistening tiles that caught the reflective glimmer off the water at a certain time of day. Dan had been to this garden before and noted the shell, thinking it probably helped to focus the sound of bubbling water, which it did, but it was the surprise reflection in the tiles that really delighted his senses when he revisited the garden later in the day.

Inspired by his research, Dan incorporated an economic water feature into his own garden. He knew he wanted some water, but he didn't want to alter the landscape dramatically in order to introduce a pond or falls. Searching his property, he identified an area where a small swale already existed between two low mounds. Dan placed an urn there, rigging it with a pump. Below the swale he installed a hidden reservoir topped with cobbles at grade.

The cobbles of Dan's quick fountain extend down his swale for a few feet and disappear under an arching canopy of fine grasses that play in the wind, cleverly recalling the movement of water over a fall. The effect is simple and magical. (By the way, we hope to arrange a visit to Dan's garden sometime in the future.)

Thanks, Dan, for your fascinating program. Thanks, also, to everyone who assisted in staging and operating this year's Water Blossom Festival.

Despite the recent draining of Berkeley Lake for repairs, waterlilies found there are likely to survive.

The pink-blooming naturalized Berkeley Lake lily (shown below) has since been named *N. 'Denver's Delight.'* The white blooming variant is named *N. 'Bea Taplin.'*



Denver Botanic Gardens

Berkeley Lake Drained

You may have seen recent reports of a large fish kill in Denver's Berkeley Lake. The die-off was not the result of accidental environmental poisoning, although such accidents do happen. (See the article "Death in the wind" on page 5.) Berkeley Lake's fish kill was the result of a deliberate draw-down of water level in order to make repairs to infrastructure. Reducing the volume and depth of the lake concentrated the fish and reduced available oxygenated water, resulting in death by suffocation.

It's unfortunate that the scheduled draw-down coincided with our hottest weather. Higher air temperatures mean higher water temperatures, of course, and warmer water is less able to retain oxygen – hence the reason that home fish keepers often run bubblers, aerators, or waterfalls during the height of the summer season in order to oxygenate the water.

Although a large number of fish died as a result of the draining, some survived and are being netted and removed to other lakes for the duration of the repairs. Another native of Berkeley Lake, naturalized pink and white blooming waterlilies, are also likely to survive despite harsh treatment. Joe Tomocik recalls that they've survived to repopulate the lake after at least one other similar draw-down of water. Additionally, the lilies have been collected through the years and are now part of the collection at Denver Botanic Gardens, several metro area golf courses, and even the lake that adjoins Club member Ben Coleman's home. (For more about Ben's own Berkeley Lake collection, read "Waterside at Ben and Olga's on page 4.)

The Berkeley Lake waterlily comes in two bloom color variants – one white, one pink. After some years of observation in Denver Botanic Gardens' collection, the two color variations have been named. The pink-blooming lily is *Nymphaea 'Denver's Delight.'* The white-bloomer is *N. 'Bea Taplin.'* Both are vigorous plants and, of course, well suited to planting, or growing again, in unlined lake bottoms.

Celebrating Joe! *(...continued from front page)*

In those days the Zoo and the Botanic Gardens were directly managed by municipal government. Workers at both facilities were employees of the City and County of Denver. When a position opened at the Gardens, Joe transferred there as a "gardener/florist." Joe recalls "*People said I was crazy to consider coming to Denver Botanic Gardens. I knew it was the thing to do.*"

Joe was first assigned to the DBG grounds department. He worked for a while in what is now the Plains Garden. He also managed trial gardens that were then located roughly where the Monet deck and Hackberry bosque stand today. Thinking back on the years he spent on grounds maintenance at the Zoo, Joe had some ideas he wanted to try on the turf at the Gardens. When he presented his initiatives to his supervisor, she said, "*...But that's what I do.*" She suggested instead that Joe "*...do something with the ponds.*" At the time the ponds were treated mostly as large reflecting pools for the terrestrial plantings. Few aquatic plants were in the Garden's general collection and the large sweeps of concrete water basins were a particularly visible, and blank, expanse.

Joe took his supervisor's challenge and began to collect aquatic plants from the few local sources. He remembers traveling by DBG van his first summer to purchase tropical waterlilies from a nursery in Littleton. Eventually he began to order delivery of hardy and tropical lilies, lotus, marginals, and Victoria waterlilies. As the

(continued on page ...8)

Celebrating Joe! *(...continued from page 7)*

ponds began to break into luxurious growth and blooms, terrestrial gardeners at DBG were amazed by the change water plants had on the impact of the summer garden landscape. Joe was willing to accept the accolades of genius that the public and staff offered his colorful displays, but he confided in people who bothered to ask that, in truth, it was really hard to kill waterlilies.

One day his supervisor found Joe and said, *"There's someone out by the ponds. I think he's 'big' in waterlilies. Go see what he wants."* The person Joe met that day was Walter Pagels, who was indeed "big in waterlilies." Pagels had by this time constructed a number of ponds for his own use and was operating a water gardening supply business in San Diego. He went on to become a "founding member and first president of the International Water Lily Society (IWLS) ... Today the organization is known as the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society (IWGS)."¹

Out of that meeting with Walter Pagels, Joe developed an expanding web of connections within the water gardening world at just the time that aquatics was beginning to capture the imagination of both professional gardeners and back-yard enthusiasts. Soon Joe's efforts at DBG attracted local interest. Joe gave some classes in the early '80's with goals of increasing interest in water gardening and training some volunteers to help with DBG's growing (literally "growing") inventory of water plants. And so it was that Joe's class gave rise to organizational efforts by John and Mary Mirgon and others that eventually led to the founding of CWGS in 1983.

Joe had started waterlily trials soon after assuming responsibility for the water gardens. He remembers, *"The first waterlily competition ever (IWGS) was held at our Gardens at the Third Symposium in Denver in 1987. 'Ray Davies' (pink hardy waterlily) hybridized by Perry Slocum was the top vote getter."* He notes that trials have continued in various forms, from which *"nine unique and beautiful waterlilies (including the bright yellow 'Joey Tomocik') comprise the Gardens' signature waterlilies, the Rocky Mountain Legacy Collection."*

Through the late 80's and '90's DBG and CWGS worked with Joe to expand national and international connections through symposia and waterlily trials that were held periodically at the Gardens. During his time as Curator of Water Gardens, Joe has given three banquet presentations for the IWGS, written periodically for The WaterGarden, and also contributed a series for Water Gardeners International (WGI) under the heading 'Diary of a Professional Water Gardener.'

In recent years Joe continued to work with local interests, developing connections to projects in City Park, Denver University, and local golf courses that were seeking to restore or develop water gardens from impoundments that had been strictly functional. And, increasingly, Joe became focused upon encouraging front range backyard water gardeners and educating the public. Most recently Joe created 'Operation Flytrap', a program designed to have fun while teaching conservation to the public, using Venus Fly Traps and other carnivorous plants. (There's an article on page 4 regarding this program.)

For his efforts in *"...promoting, encouraging, and fostering the discovery, growth, research, development, and improvement of the family Nymphaeaceae and Companion Aquatic Plants and the dissemination of information pertaining thereto to the membership and to the general public..."*, Joe was elected to the IWGS Hall of Fame in 1997, joining other waterlily luminaries including Walter Pagels, George Pring, Kirk Strawn, Perry Slocum and CWGS' own John and Mary Mirgon. Joe is also an Honorary Life Member of the Colorado Water Garden Society.

What more can we bestow on Joe? Maybe a little cake and good times! Join us on the evening of September 15 as we celebrate Joe's accomplishments in aquatics and in life. Details about the party are on the front page of this newsletter. Please join us.

References:

Quote from "Walter Pagels...", by Cyndie Thomas. Online at www.victoria_adventure.com.





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 Pond Tour (July) ___
 Water Blossom Festival (August) ___

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THISYEAR

A calendar of CWGS Activities and Events:

Sept. 15:

Gates Hall, Denver Botanic Gardens

6:00 PM - Potluck dinner followed by Annual Board Elections and recognition of retiring DBG Curator of Water Gardens Joe Tomocik

Oct. 20: *Potluck dinner and meeting, DBG*

Dec. 15: *Holiday Banquet, DBG*



From...

TheWaterGarden
c/o Journal Editor
1210 Clayton Street
Denver, CO 80206-3214

The Colorado Water Garden Society (CWGS) is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization founded in 1983 to encourage appreciation and interest in the use of water in the landscape.

To learn more, visit us at
www.colowatergardensociety.org

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