



Rhododendron 'PJM Elite' J. McKenney

Potomac Valley
Chapter

North American
Rock Garden
Society

PVC
Bulletin

January 2012



Crocus imperati A. Nicolson

Jim McKenney, Editor jimmckenney@jimmckenney.com
<http://www.pvcnargs.org/>

You can pay your dues by sending your check for \$15 to Margot Ellis, 2417 N Taylor St., Arlington, VA 22207

Calendar

Most meeting are Saturday mornings- 9:30am coffee; 10am presentation, unless otherwise noted.

Coffee/Tea and donuts to be provided at meetings but it is proposed to provide lemonade only at workshops and plant exchanges, unless we have a volunteer to do coffee there.

2012

January 28, 2012 *The Evolution of My Gardens, or How My Gardens Prove That There Is No Such Thing as Intelligent Design*, Peter George, NARGS President (Head of our parent organization)

Where: United States National Arboretum in the 'classroom' which is really a multi-purpose meeting room in the trailers which are across the street to the West (not ones near greenhouses).

A preview from Peter:

I started gardening in 1996, completely ignorant of anything other than vegetables. One of my friends here in Petersham , Massachusetts , was a rock gardener, and he thought I should be as well. So with his help I dug out a relatively small area on the south side of my house, on a slope adjacent to my driveway, and started a 'rock garden.' With his help it grew a bit, year by year. Each year I got more interested, and, as my success increased, I expanded. I was attending the Berkshire Chapter meetings, and after a few years hanging around with rock garden luminaries like Lorie Chips, Nick Nickou, Geoffrey Charlesworth, Anne Spiegel, and Elisabeth Zander, I actually began to get 'good' at this gardening stuff. And, I took on a few jobs at the Chapter. Now, 16 years later, I'm President of NARGS and have a pretty substantial group of rock gardens.

My program, titled *The Evolution of My Gardens, or How My Gardens Prove That There Is No Such Thing as Intelligent Design*, is a pleasant and humorous journey through my years of gardening. I'll be focusing on the 'how' and 'why' without boring people with a catalog of 140 slides of plants and flowers.

I live in Petersham , MA , a town of 53 square miles in north central MA, with a population of 1100 people. My Greek Revival house, built in 1837, is located in the historic district on a perfectly flat plot of 4 acres, which we bought

because we had horses. When they died, after long and happy lives, it was time to use the land differently. So the gardening began.

February 18, 2012 *Extra Dry, on the Rocks; the Xeric Gardens at JCRaulston Arboretum*, Charles Kidder, Curator, Scree/ Rock Garden, JC Raulston Arboretum Where: Brookside Gardens, Wheaton, MD,

March 3, 2012 *Small Rock Garden Design; in Celebration of Artifice*, Steve Whitesell, Landscape Architect, Where: Brookside Gardens, Wheaton, MD

Contents of this issue

President's message Dick Hammerschlag	p. 2	The pergola at Sandy Springs Museum	p. 6
The Expanding Garden Robert Faden	p. 2	Clean-up crew at the Banfileds'	p. 7
Holiday season bloomers	p. 3	Our booth at the Green Spring sales	p. 8
Elizabeth Lawrence and Virginia Woolf	p. 4	Obituaries	p.8
Is this the Red Line fern?	p. 6	Books	p.8
		Storage space needed	p. 9
		And finally...	p. 9

Deadline for next edition February 15, 2012

Message from the Chairman

From the incoming PVC Board, we hope the members had the best of holidays and will have a very rewarding, perhaps 'rocky' green year ahead. Generally the leadership resolutions for the Chapter will be to build upon the strong base we inherited. At the heart will be the lectures, plant trades, sales, hopefully some revealing trips, picnics etc. We will strive to keep things stimulating, help build mutual interest, friendships and even try some innovations. Throughout we will focus on the rock gardening theme. To make the Chapter run smoothly and successfully we will need solid contributions meaning cooperation/volunteering from the members. Let's see what we can accomplish!

Dick Hammerschlag
PCV President

A New Gravel Garden in Simpson Park, Alexandria

We are not supposed to be able to grow rock garden plants in our area. This misconception stems from the idea that all rock garden plants are alpiners and that precious few

alpiners can endure our hot and humid summers. However, anyone who has seen the public rock gardens at Green Spring Gardens Park (Annandale, VA) and in Simpson Park (Alexandria, VA) or were lucky enough to visit the private gardens of Sasha Borkovec (Silver Spring, MD) and Lynn Makela (Springfield, VA), before they left us, knows that we can indeed grow rock garden plants here, provided that we select appropriate plants and furnish them with suitable micro-habitats.

Rock garden plants do require special growing conditions. Unless one is lucky enough to have natural outcrops or steep slopes, rock garden plants are best grown in containers (hypertufa troughs, etc.), raised beds, sand beds or gravel gardens. All can provide the necessary conditions: excellent drainage, good air flow, full sun or, for some species, some shade at the hottest time of day.

The focus of this column is on the new gravel garden in Simpson Park which was designed and installed by my wife Audrey Faden and other Master Gardeners and only fully planted up this year. You may have seen it if you were on the garden tour last spring, but many plants have been added since then.

What is a gravel garden? It is a raised bed whose most prominent features are a gravel mulch and scattered boulders. Aesthetically, the boulders and gravel should be of the same kind of stone, as if both were derived from the same outcrop, but that's not always possible.

The origins of the Simpson Park gravel garden go back three years, when Audrey and the Master Gardeners put in a ditch 2 ft wide, 1½ ft deep and 12 ft long on top of the berm of the Water-wise Garden in Simpson Park and filled it with ¾" gravel, topped with pine needles. The purpose of this was to capture more rain and to direct it deeper into the berm, where it could become available to the plants, affording them better drought resistance. It worked like a dream and serendipitously created a habitat for plants requiring perfect drainage.

This successful experiment made Audrey determined to start work on a gravel garden elsewhere in the park. The area selected had a crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia faurei*) at the south end. In order not to kill the tree, the soil in the area delineated for the gravel garden was slowly improved with the addition of 1-2" of good loam with a sprinkling of green sand and rock phosphate. Further away from the tree root zone, but within the new bed, 3-4" of loam was added, creating a berm.

The following year (2010) a mixture of pea gravel, matching ¾" gravel, and some larger, rounded boulders was added. The gravel varied from about 8" deep at the top of the berm to less than 3" under the crape myrtle. Matching rocks were set into the ground, forming an edging, and a path of flagstones and pea gravel was installed on the west side. In order to stabilize the gravel, slate slabs were set vertically into the highest part of the berm. A few perennials, including *Baptisia arachnifera*, were planted in the fall of 2010, but most of the planting was left for 2011.

So far, survival has been very good, despite the abundant rainfall. Our main regret has been the very limited space with deep gravel, because there is no shortage of suitable plants. Some plants that we have been trying include: *Agastache* 'Cotton Candy', various *Delosperma* species and cultivars, *Jasione perennis* 'Sky Blue', *Kniphofia hirsuta* 'Fire Dance', *Lithodora diffusa* 'White Star', *Salvia argentea*, *S. daghestanica*, *S. jurisicii*, *S. pisdica* (all of the salvias grown from NARGS seed!), *Thalictrum ichangense*, several species of *Penstemon*, and *Viola pedata*. Of course, there are lots more, no doubt too many if they all do well!

Here are a few tips.

1. Like sand beds, gravel beds will have few weeds if the gravel is deep enough. (The numbers may increase over time, as earthworms bring up soil from below into the gravel.)
2. Unlike sand beds, gravel beds do not attract cats.
3. Bareroot plants before planting them to keep the gravel clean and encourage downward root growth. (This may not be best for all plants!)
4. If you expect them to last, don't put plants too close to one another, and avoid fast-spreading ground covers.
5. Avoid putting gravel gardens in public spaces, especially near children's playgrounds (like the one in Simpson Park!). Small persons of the juvenile variety do not respect gravel gardens, running through them and redistributing all but the heaviest rocks. The five and under sort find gravel irresistible to pick up and toss.
6. Do as we say, not....

The Expanding Garden

Robert Faden

Holiday season bloomers

Christmas and New Year's Day lists

The mild fall weather this year led to expectations of good lists of plants in bloom during the holiday season. We were not disappointed: this year's list includes about 100 nominally different entries.

In the weeks approaching Christmas several of us exchanged emails reporting plants in bloom or about to bloom. Those reporting include Anne Mazaitis (M in the list below), Jim Dronenburg and Dan Weil (D), Sue Hodap (Hp), Dixie Hougen (Hn), Alice Nicolson (N), Judith Tyler (T), the Fadens (F) and Jim McKenney (Mc).

The list which follows includes some items reported in the lead up to Christmas and assumes that items reported as in advanced bud were in fact in bloom by Jan. 1.

Arbutus unedo D (blooming for the first time)

Camellia 'Christmas Cheer' T
Camellia japonica 'April Remembered' Hp
Camellia japonica cultivar unspecified, neighbor's yard N
Camellia japonica 'Lady Clare' D, Hn
Camellia japonica 'Les Marburg' Hn
Camellia oleifera N
Camellia sasanqua Hp, T, Mc

Camellia 'Snow Flurry' F
Camellia 'Spring Promise' F
Camellia 'Winter's Beauty' F
Camellia 'Winter's Star' F
Camellia × *vernalis* 'Yuletide' N, T
Chaenomeles maybe 'Jet Trail' D
Chaenomeles orange-pink in advanced bud (M)
Chimonanthus praecox Hn, D, T, F
Chimonanthus praecox 'Luteus' N, T, Mc
Chimonanthus praecox 'Luteus' seedling Hp



Chimonanthus praecox 'Luteus'

Corydalis hondoensis F
Corydalis lutea see *Pseudofumaria*
Crocus imperati N, Hn

Cyclamen coum Hn, D, T, Mc
Cyclamen elegans Hn
Cyclamen hederifolium Hn
Daphne 'Eternal Fragrance' Hn
Dendranthema of various sorts D, M, F
Dendranthema × *grandiflorum*
 (*Chrysanthemum* × *morifolium*) F
Dendranthema zawadskii
 (*Chrysanthemum* × *rubellum*
 'Hillside Pink' and other colors) F
Dianthus annual pinks D

Dianthus japonicus F
Elaeagnus pungens D, Mc
Erica × *darleyensis* M
Erysimum 'Bowles' Mauve' F
Erysimum helveticum M
Forsythia sp. F
Fragaria vesca M
Galanthus elwesii N, F, Mc



Galanthus elwesii

Geranium sanguineum F
Hamamelis vernalis D
Helleborus foetidus F, Mc



Helleborus foetidus

Helleborus garden hellebores several dozen sorts T
Helleborus niger Hn
Helleborus niger 'HGC Jacob' T
Helleborus niger 'HGC Josef Lemper' N, T
Helleborus 'Walburton's Rosemary' T ; Judith says "we think this one is a definite winner"
Hepatica semi-double pink T
Iris unguicularis cretensis Hn
Iris unguicularis 'Walter Butt' N
Iris unguicularis "big blue" Mc
Jasminum nudiflorum N, F, Mc
Lonicera fragrantissima Hn, D, F, Mc

Lonicera × *heckrottii* M
Lonicera × *purpusii* 'Winter Beauty' F
Mahonia aquifolium F
Mahonia 'Arthur Menzies' advanced buds T
Mahonia bealei T, F
Mahonia 'Charity' T
Mahonia eurybracteata 'Soft Caress' advanced buds T
Mahonia eurybracteata F
Mahonia japonica F
Mahonia 'Lionel Fortescue' T
Mahonia repens advanced buds T
Mahonia 'Underway' T
Mahonia 'Winter Sun' T
Mazus reptans M
Narcissus tazetta in a cold frame Mc
Narcissus 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation' T, F (opened mid-December for F)
Osmanthus fragrans T
Osmanthus heterophyllus 'Variegata' F
Osmanthus with white flowers, not heterophyllus D
Phacelia bipinnatifida F
Phlox subulata F
Prunus mume 'Josephine' T
Prunus mume 'Omoi No Mama' T
Prunus mume 'Peggy Clark' T
Prunus mume various seedlings T
Prunus mume white semidouble T
Prunus mume, unspecified cultivar D, F
Pseudofumaria (Corydalis) lutea F, Hp
Pseudofumaria alba (Corydalis ochroleuca) F
Rosmarinus officinalis M, F
Rudbeckia unspecified annual sort M
Salvia nemorosa F
Sarcococca maybe *confusa* D
Spiraea thunbergii Mellow Yellow N blooms and foliage
Symphyotrichum (Aster) novae-angliae F
Symphyotrichum pilosum (Aster pilosus) F
Tagetes lucida Hn
Taraxacum officinale Mc
Viburnum farreri 'Nana' F
Viburnum rhytidophyllum a variegated form D
Viburnum rhytidophyllum F
Viburnum × *rhytidophylloides* F
Viola odorata F
Viola odorata 'Rosea' N

Viola rupestris 'Rosea' F
Viola striata F
Viola walteri N
Viola, various pansies and violas D

Bob Faden provided this note with the Faden list:

The following is a list of plants that were in flower on January 1, 2012 in our garden and/or the gardens on the YMCA or in Simpson Park, Alexandria. This is by far the greatest variety ever, reflecting our extremely mild December weather. I seriously doubt whether we had a temperature below the high 20s during the month. The very cold temperatures of Jan. 3 and 4 probably killed off many of the following:

Elizabeth Lawrence and Virginia Woolf

Edith Eddleman was our featured speaker for our late October meeting, and her topic was Elizabeth Lawrence. Near the end of her presentation she mentioned a posthumously published collection of Lawrence's work, *A Garden of One's Own*. A hand shot up, and the question was asked: did that title reflect an interest on Lawrence's part in the work of Virginia Woolf, author of the seminal feminist essay *A Room of One's Own*? Murmurs of doubt were heard around the room, and Eddleman was not aware that it did.

Your editor decided to pass the question on to Bobby Ward, who probably knows as much about Elizabeth Lawrence as any living person. Here are the question I asked and his response:

Bobby, Edith Eddleman spoke on Elizabeth Lawrence to our local NARGS chapter yesterday. She mentioned the posthumously published collection *A Garden of One's Own*. No sooner had she said the words than I thought of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Do you know if this title was chosen by Lawrence herself, or by those who put that collection together? And was the title meant in any way to echo Virginia Woolf's work?

Jim, yes, you are right. The title comes from a long piece I wrote for our rock garden newsletter in 1992, in which I described the correspondence between Lawrence and Linda Lamm, a friend in eastern North Carolina. Linda loaned me about 100 letters that she had received from Lawrence, a treasure trove of talk

about plants, authors (Eudora Welty, Vita Sackville-West), travels, the *New Yorker* magazine (Lamm's brother was Joseph Mitchell, a long-term writer at the *New Yorker*), and about *New Yorker* writer Katharine White, with whom Lawrence had correspondence (and that correspondence has been published as *Two Gardeners*, ed. by Emily Wilson).

In the letters that date from 1960 to 1984 (Lawrence died in 1985), there is mention of several writing projects Lawrence was working on--and Lamm read some of the chapters and commented. Lawrence makes references to a book she's working on about gardeners, another on flowers of the church, and then one called "A Garden of One's Own." It's not clear from the letters if that's the intended title of the gardeners book or not.

So, I titled my article for the rock garden newsletter "A Garden of One's Own", as she had used the name but also because the letters were so full of literary references, including Woolf.

When I co-edited the Lawrence collection with UNC Press, the editors had some dull working title and I suggested to change it to *A Garden of One's Own*, as it echoes the literary aspect of Lawrence's writing and in some odd way, it's the title of the book she never published. So, that's how we published it. It turns out there was another gardening book by the same title, which I didn't know about at the time, then out of print. But as titles are not copyrightable, no one seems to care. I sometimes run across the title at a used book store. (And by the way, the original piece I wrote on the letters is one of the chapter's in *A Garden of One's Own*, as a sort of end piece.)

So that's the story.



Edith Eddleman at Brookside Gardens, holding a piece of *Smilax smalli*.

Is this the Red Line fern?



Your Editor lifted this piece from his blog. I don't know how many of you have seen the blog entry, but the subject of this piece is so interesting that it deserves more notice.

The local branch of the Washington, D.C. subway system is the Red Line. Who would have thought that attentive riders of this line can do some botanizing deep below the streets of the city above? Yet there they are: as the trains approach stops such as Woodley there are illuminated signs, and if you peer closely you'll notice a fringe of green in the glow of the lights. That fringe of green is a fern, a fern of the genus *Adiantum*. I don't know which species it is, but the one shown above, *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, is a likely candidate. This species grows in many countries around the Mediterranean and from northern South America well up into North America. On the Atlantic coast it gets as far north as Virginia.

On the other hand, there are several tropical species of this genus which are commonly sold as house plants, and over the years many of these have probably been brought into the subway system by shoppers. Perhaps spores from one of these got things going.

Whatever they are, it's a surprise to see them deep in the subway system. They are abundant and easily spotted at several stops. Are they confined to the Red Line? I don't know; perhaps someone reading this will comment.

The pergola at the Sandy Springs, Md. Museum

Your editor was running an errand in outer Montgomery County, MD back in June. As he passed through the town of Sandy Springs, MD

he caught sight of something which, but for the other traffic, would have literally stopped him in his tracks. That something was a long pergola over the sidewalk leading to the Sandy Springs Museum.



The pergola is covered from end to end with *Wisteria frutescens*, and it was in full bloom at the time. At the base of some of the pergola piers were big clumps of an old tall bearded iris of a color which nearly matched that of the wisteria flowers. What a handsome sight!



The racemes of the flowers of *Wisteria frutescens* are short and chunky compared to those of the Chinese and Japanese garden

wisterias, and even in full bloom suggest a Chinese wisteria just beginning to bloom.



Clean-up crew at the Banfields'



On October 8, 2011, a group of us met at the Banfield home to help clean up the garden. Power tools in variety were soon buzzing, chopping, chipping and cutting away. Handsome old shrubs emerged from under cloaks of smothering vines. The lawns were cleared of debris. The outlines of borders became apparent under the tangled growth of weeds. An Agave with pups turned up under the growth near the greenhouse. During breaks some of us went in to say hello to Jo and her husband: when asked what she thought of all this, she gave a broad smile and enthusiastically shot up two thumbs.

In the photo above you can see, left to right in the front row, Susan Rountree, Margot Ellis, John Rountree and Jim Dronenburg. In the back row, again left to right, Anne Mazaitis, Kevin McIntosh, Sue Hodap, Alice Nicolson, Jim McKenney and Chris Herbstritt.

My apologies to the photographer: I forgot who took the photo.



This little one turned up wedged in the porch supports. It's the Northern Brown Snake or DeKay's Snake, *Storeria dekayi*, a common species in the greater Washington, D.C. area. After the photo session it was gently tucked back into the place it was found. We saw none of its bigger relatives.

Our booth at the Green Spring sale

OK, it's not a booth so much as a re-purposed dining fly. Margot Ellis did a nice job with the banner, didn't she? Give some thought to spending some time at our booth at the next Green Spring event. It's a great way to get to know the other members who show up.



Obituaries

Not members of PVCNARGS but notable:

Wolfgang Oehme died on December 15th. For a look at his life and work, visit his web site here: <http://www.wocogardens.com/>

Bob Stewart, great plantsman and founder of Arrowhead Alpines, passed on December 16th after a long and brave battle against cancer. Bob's wife, Brigitta, will continue to run Arrowhead as the same unique nursery you've come to love.

Frank Cabot died on November 19. Bobby Ward provided the following:

I have received news that NARGS member Frank Cabot has died at age 86, on Saturday, November 19, 2011. Frank was the founder of The Garden Conservancy in 1989 and was involved in numerous horticultural organizations.

Frank was NARGS treasurer from 1977-1984 and the co-organizer of the Society's 50th anniversary meeting in Asheville in 1984. He was supporter of many NARGS activities, including the Norman Singer Endowment Fund and donor to NARGS of copies of "The Caucasus and Its Flowers" by Vojtech Holubec. Frank was a speaker at NARGS Study Weekends and at local chapters.

Bill Noble, Director of Preservation for The Garden Conservancy, has provided the attached obituary released by the Conservancy.

Funeral services will be private. A memorial celebration will be held in the garden of Les Quatre Vents for family and friends in 2012 at a date coinciding with the inception of spring and the peak of the primula moment. Contributions may be made to The Garden Conservancy, PO Box 219 or the Quatre Vents Foundation, PO Box 222, both at Cold Spring, New York 10516, or to the charity of your choice.

BOOKS

A Guide to Smithsonian Gardens

By Carole Ottesen

Published by Smithsonian Books

List Price: \$14.95

Reviewer: Cheval Force Opp

Carole Ottesen gives the reader a comprehensive and informative guide to the Smithsonian gardens. As I always recommend these gardens to my friends and garden visitors, I am delighted to have this reference for these distinctive gardens.

The Smithsonian gardens are one of the best kept secrets in our Capital Region. Ottesen reviews each of the 10 gardens in the DC campus, the National Zoo gardens, and a garden in New York I did not know existed: the Arthur Ross Terrace and Garden of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum at Fifth Avenue at 91st Street in Manhattan. I am adding this to my list for my next city visit.

Complementing the garden descriptions are chapters on the Smithsonian plant productions and exhibitions, collections, and education.

Pages are crowded with lush photos of plants and gardens, but I must admit my favorite photo is of two mounted Park Police letting their horses guzzle out of the acanthus fountain in the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden.

Each of the 12 gardens reviewed begins with a history paired with archive photos from the past. Some of the Smithsonian's most formal gardens began as back alleys and have had many other lives. Did you know there was once a taxidermy shop where the Enid A. Haupt Garden now grows?

Photos and inserts give background on some of the magnificent specimens found on Smithsonian grounds. The Persian ironwood (*Parrotia persica*) in the Freer courtyard is a good example.

Sculptures in the landscapes have cameo descriptions like the black beauty Nymph by Aristide Maillol gracing the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Seldom-seen blooming beauties are shown, like *Cyrtochilum macasense*, one of the rarest orchids in cultivation in the world.

The Smithsonian staff make all this happen and are the real stars of the gardens. For their creativity, talent, and long hours in our region's hot, cold, and everything in-between weather I give a big "thank you." I hope this book encourages more people to enjoy the wonderful gardens they have given us.

About the reviewer: Cheval Force Opp lives and gardens in Dunn Loring, VA. When she is not visiting gardens, she lectures and writes about gardens. Owner of Garden Tours LLC, she leads custom garden tours to the more than 100 public gardens in the Capital Region.

Reprinted with permission from *Washington Gardener* magazine's summer 2011 issue.

For *Sempervivum* enthusiasts

Schweizerbart Science Publishers are pleased to announce the availability of:

Lloyd Praeger: *An Account of the Sempervivum Group*

(high-quality reprint, originally published by the Royal Horticultural Society, London 1932)

Information+flyer+sample pages <http://schweizerbart.com/9783443500368>

Praeger's classic provides a systematic description of the Sempervivum Group

(Crassulaceae). General introduction to systematics, history, variability, hybrids, parasites, epiphytes, teratology, cultivation, economics and hardy Sempervivums in gardens. Systematic second part with descriptions and illustrations of Sempervivum, Aichryson, Aeonium, Greenovia and Monanthes of the Sempervivum-Group. Addendum with garden names and index with species and synonym names.

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Storage space needed

Sometime during the next two months we need to find permanent storage space for the dining fly we use at the Green Spring plant sales. Ideally, this storage space would be in Northern Virginia and close to Green Spring Park. The space needed is about 9'x2' x2'. Contact Dick Hammerschlag peachnfrog66@comcast.net if you are able to do this.

And finally...

The chapter's board of directors met yesterday and discussed a wide range of issues relating to the chapter's activities in the months ahead. Early this morning I picked up *Rock Gardening in the Greater Washington, D.C. Region*. I was looking for more information about Al Paulson. In Jo Banfield's article "Potomac Valley Chapter: A Short History" I learned that Al Paulson had been Chairman of the group in 1985, and that Russ Kirk, who also passed last year, was a charter member.

What interested me most about Jo's account was the sense it gave (to me at least) of how different the chapter was back then. In the early days the group seems to have been completely self-reliant. Speakers, as likely as not, came from within the group. About ten years after our group was started it became an official chapter of NARGS (which at the time was called the ARGS).

I would like to suggest that all members concerned about the future of our group take the time to read that article.

Officers, Committee Chairs and Board of Directors 2011

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Parliamentarian - open

Hospitality –Audit – open

Outreach and Educaton - open

Board of Directors: all current officers, the immediate past president and committee chairs

