

# MESSAGE FROM CHIPPER

*by Chipper Wichman,*

*Director and Chief Executive Officer*

Aloha to our friends and supporters,

As we look ahead we are enthused about what the future holds for the National Tropical Botanical Garden. Thanks to your support and in spite of the economy we continue to accomplish great things at all of our five gardens and make considerable strides in each of our mission-related programs.

One of the exciting projects we are preparing to begin in the new year is improving the McBryde Garden. Our goal is to enhance the visitor experience, increase McBryde's educational value, improve environmental practices, and continue expansion of the extensive living collections. Undertaking an effort of this importance and long-term significance is not for the faint of heart. It not only requires a great deal of internal planning, but also seeking input from outside experts. Fortunately we have a great foundation to build upon that was established by previous NTBG directors.

Although NTBG broke ground in the Lāwa'ī Valley in 1970, it was not until Dr. William Klein became director in 1994 that we embarked on any serious master planning relating to the McBryde Garden. Under Klein's watch, we developed the concept of a new visitors center located in Po'ipū near Spouting Horn with trams that would bring visitors into the McBryde and Allerton gardens, along the spectacular coast and over the old sugar cane train rail bed that leads down into the valley. The visitors center was completed in 1997 and, for the first time since the hurricane in 1992, NTBG was able to truly promote its beautiful gardens in the Lāwa'ī Valley as an educational and recreational opportunity for the public. While most visitors came to see the internationally famous Allerton Garden many also explored McBryde, discovering a virtual treasure house of tropical plants and stunning views, but poorly defined and often slippery dirt and cinder trails, making their visit a true 'exploration'.

In 2002, under Director Paul Cox, the NTBG undertook a comprehensive planning effort with Jones & Jones, a nationally ranked firm that specializes in master planning for botanical gardens, to address the McBryde Garden itself. Completed in 2003, the Jones & Jones master plan was a result of input from the staff and volunteers, and laid out a wonderful vision including relocated roads, new trails and paths, new facilities for nursery operations and equipment maintenance, food service for visitors, and even a canopy walkway to access the area by the waterfall!

Having a good master plan is like having a road map that will help you reach the destination on which you have set your sights. It helps you to place your facilities in the right location, avoid conflicts with pedestrians and vehicles, and most especially allow the plants, which are the heart-and-soul of any garden, to effectively serve the tri-fold purpose of conservation, research, and education without sacrificing their beauty or the beauty of their surroundings. Without proper planning and landscape design many botanical gardens run the risk of becoming an amorphous mass of interesting plants.

While the plan is comprehensive it is also important to remember that it covers hundreds of acres and is focused mostly on major infrastructure. It does not include an interpretive plan, a planting plan, an irrigation plan, or a strategic development plan for building it out. This means that the plan provides a starting point but we need to work out the details that will allow us to implement this vision.

Over the past year we have put a lot of thought into how best to proceed. My wife Hau'oli and I visited major botanical gardens in the United States, Europe, and Asia during the summer. In September, NTBG Trustees Peter Goltra and Ghilleen Prance made arrangements for three of our staff to visit some of the most successful gardens in the United Kingdom (see story on page 23).

Both the summer and fall site visits were extremely enlightening, as we not only got to see the gardens themselves but we had the chance to pick the brains of directors and key staff at these other gardens who deal with the same type of issues.

In October we formed the McBryde Garden Planning Committee and began an intensive series of meetings that will prepare us for a workshop in late March 2011, when we will bring in external experts to participate in a two-day planning session.

What do we hope to accomplish out of all this? First off, the committee is looking at all aspects of the master plan to determine if any parts of it need to be updated or changed. We have identified that no location was designated for large events and that the location proposed for the educational pavilion is in an area prone to flooding. We also need a location for a children's garden that will draw in more families and enhance their experience. But overall we believe that the vision of the Jones & Jones plan is right for McBryde.

The committee is producing a 'SWOC analysis': Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges. This will help us in our long-range planning to chart a course that builds on our strengths and takes better advantage of opportunities, that overcomes challenges and mitigates or avoids the weaknesses and threats to our vision. A good example is the Southshore Visitors Center in Po'ipū. Its location outside of the valley next to a major visitor attraction (Spouting Horn) gives us the opportunity to draw in more people. However, the fact that guests cannot simply walk into the valley gardens is indeed a challenge, one which could be further exacerbated if our trams break down or the road is closed due to muddy conditions. Identifying SWOCs is fundamental to good planning.

Also as part of the process, we are gathering information for

preparation of a master interpretive plan. This will create meaning and understanding out of the raw beauty, rich history, and biodiversity that exist in McBryde — and become a primary educational tool for us. We need to make McBryde Garden come alive so that the visitors will leave feeling enriched by it and connected to it.

And finally the group will look at our extensive living collections and consider how these incredible assets can be better utilized and arranged to educate our visitors about our reliance upon, and connection to, plants. With a mandate to collect and preserve species from all over the tropical world it is easy to have the collections begin to lose focus and form. As we look at the role of our plants we will also consider the potential value and/or need for input from a qualified landscape architect. We are creating a legacy that will live beyond all of us and how we arrange and locate plants are key factors that we have often overlooked in the past.

I think you can now see why we are thrilled about this project. We have been given a tremendous opportunity to take the McBryde Garden to the next level as a garden of both science and beauty. Our ultimate goal is that each and every person who comes here leaves not only having experienced one of the most beautiful places in the world but with a greater understanding of the fragility of our planet and our dependence on nature. We aim to infuse them with hope, with inspiration, and with a deep appreciation for the important work of the National Tropical Botanical Garden. These are goals worthy of all our efforts.

— CRW

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