

American Rhododendron Society awards Berks resident Gold Medal

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ARS President Ann Mangels (left) and Rhododendron Journal Editor Glen Jamieson (right) present Steve Henning of Rockland Township, Berks County the ARS Gold Medal at the ARS 2019 International Convention in Malvern.

The American Rhododendron Society surprised Steve Henning, of Rockland Township, Berks County, at its international convention in Malvern on May 18, by presenting him the ARS Gold Medal Award.

The award was presented for significant contributions over a period of time to the Society and to the genus Rhododendron that have national or international impact.

According to the society website, Henning immersed himself “fully in a wide variety of activities that support the American Rhododendron Society. These include maintaining Henning’s Rhododendron and Azalea pages for over 20 years. This publication provides a wealth of educational material on almost every aspect of rhododendrons.”

It goes on to say he has “written excellent articles and provided rhododendron photos for the ARS Journal.”

He launched on his “personal website both the Rhododendron and Azalea Bookstore and later, the ARS Store, with all proceeds directed to the ARS.”

He “acted as the Registrar for the very successful 2018 joint spring convention between the ARS and the German Rhododendron Society.”

Most recently Henning served as co-chair for the 2019 ARS Spring convention.

The award concluded with, “For his outstanding contributions, the American Rhododendron Society is presented the Gold Medal to Stephen M. Henning. May 18. 2019, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.”

After moving to Rockland Township in 1965, they discovered the American Rhododendron Society at the Philadelphia Flower Show. Henning and his wife, Darlene, have been members of the Valley Forge Chapter of the ARS since 1972. Their involvement has led them to annual ARS conventions held around the U.S., in Canada, and Scotland. Henning also helped host the 1976 and 2004 international conventions at Valley Forge, and, most recently co-chaired the 2019 international convention in Malvern.

Last year, Henning was Registrar for the 2018 ARS International Convention in Bremen, Germany. This was the first ARS convention in continental Europe. But more unusual was that it had 25 days of tours of members gardens and public gardens in The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland.

This year’s ARS convention in the Philadelphia Area’s Brandywine Valley featured tours to many of the area’s famous gardens, namely Chanticleer, Jenkins Arboretum, Longwood Gardens, Morris Arboretum, Mt. Cuba Center, Stoneleigh Estate, Tyler Arboretum, Winterthur, and 3 outstanding private gardens.

Normally, an ARS convention runs about four days, but requires about three years of preparation.

“I have concentrated on these two most recent conventions for the past four years. The European convention was unusual in having 25 days of garden tours. The Philadelphia convention was extended to five days because of the many world-famous gardens in the area,” Henning said.

Besides planning recent conventions, one of Henning’s most rewarding efforts occurred in the fall of 2010 when he learned the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., planned to destroy its hillside azalea planting which attracts thousands of people every spring. He created the website, SaveTheAzaleas.org, to raise public awareness of the plight of this historic collection that has been the most popular display at the Arboretum since it opened to visitors in 1958. The website went viral and got results when the National Arboretum publicly announced in February 2011 it cancelled its plans and in June 2011 Congress passed a bill directing the National Arboretum to maintain the azalea collection. The nonprofit Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) started a “Save the Azalea” drive that raised more than \$1 million to assure funding for the preservation and maintenance of the National Azalea Garden. Henning received the ARS Silver Medal in 2012, in part for this effort.

In 2007, Steve and Darlene received the ARS Bronze Medal. In 2009, he became the Valley Forge Chapter President. He is currently on the board of directors of the ARS. His other involvement includes the International Fellowship of Scouting Rotarians, Kutztown Rotary Club, photography, and travel.

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