

Rockland resident wins Silver Medal

The American Rhododendron Society presented Steve Henning, of Rockland Township, the ARS Silver Medal Award at its convention in Asheville, N.C., on May 4.

The award was presented for outstanding service to the ARS and the genus rhododendron.

According to the society website, Henning mastered the development of Internet websites and used them effectively to inform and instruct the public about rhododendrons.

Henning's Rhododendron and Azalea Pages were one of the earliest sources of online information.

"District 8 benefitted hugely from the website you developed for the 2009 Eastern Regional Conference. When a major historic azalea collection was announced for destruction, you took the initiative and created a website to focus activities to save it," posted on the website <http://www.rhododendron.org/awards.htm>. "Your efforts have stopped the pending destruction, helped raise monies for the continued preservation of the azaleas,



ARS Director Karel Bernady (left) and ARS President Don Smart (right) present Steve Henning the Society's Silver Medal Award.

and attracted U.S. Congressional support. For your outstanding contributions, the American Rhododendron Society is pleased to present the Silver Medal to Stephen M Henning."

Henning and his wife, Darlene, have been members of the Valley Forge Chapter of the ARS since 1972.

"When I lived in Oregon I took the large, beautifully flowering rhododendron shrubs for granted. When I moved from Oregon to Pennsylvania in 1962, nurseries here had a very

limited selection of rhododendrons," Henning said.

In a quest of good varieties he went to the Philadelphia flower show. There he found the ARS display and joined the Valley Forge Chapter.

"I took orders for good varieties for colleagues at work (Bell Labs at the Western Electric plant in Reading) and went to wholesale nurseries to pick up young rhododendron liners each spring. There are hundreds of rhododendrons in Berks County that were

among the plants I picked up," said Henning.

Their involvement has led them to annual ARS conventions held around the U.S., in Canada, Scotland, and Germany Henning also helped host the 1976 and 2004 national conventions at Valley Forge.

In 1996, he created the website, Henning's Rhododendron and Azalea Pages (rhododendrons.rhodyman.net). He sought to provide the answers to questions about rhododendron and azaleas that he had when he joined the ARS.

In 1999, Henning added an online bookstore to his website. All proceeds from this bookstore benefit the ARS Foundation and the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden.

In the fall of 2010, 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 National Arboretum invited the ARS and other horticultural groups to

meetings at the National Arboretum. Henning joined ARS President Ted Stecki at these meetings. The nonprofit Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) started a "Save the Azalea" drive that has raised more than \$1 million to assure funding for the preservation and maintenance of the azalea collection.

In 2007, Steve and Darlene received the ARS Bronze Medal. In 2009, he became the Valley Forge Chapter

President. His other involvement includes the Hawk Mountain Council Boy Scouts, Kutztown Rotary Club, photography, and travel.

Since installing a deer fence, his interest in gardening has been renewed.

"The growing deer problem is a big challenge to anyone growing rhododendrons today," he said.

Henning added, "I can even grow hostas now".