

WELCOME RHODE ISLAND!

Rhode Island has joined the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. The new joint chapter name was formally recognized at the most recent national annual meeting in West Virginia. As many of you know, Rhode Islanders have been an important part of the Massachusetts Chapter as members, board members, orchard managers and cooperators since the founding of the Massachusetts Chapter. We welcome our Rhode Island members and congratulate Yvonne Federowicz, a Rhode Island resident, as our new chapter president.



The new MA/RI Chapter President, Rhode Islander Yvonne Federowicz
Photo: Brad Smith

ANNUAL MEETING AT OLD STURBRIDGE VILLAGE

Chestnut enthusiasts from across New England gathered for the MA/RI Annual meeting at Old Sturbridge Village on November 14th. The pre-industrial American village created a beautiful setting and backdrop for the meeting. Rich Giordano was our gracious and enthusiastic host who related that he finds many people visiting the village don't know the story of the demise of American chestnut and how important it was in a village like Sturbridge. Rich is excited to help TACF spread its message through his interpretive work at OSV.



Fuller Conference Center, OSV
Photo: Brad Smith

Brad Smith opened the meeting with a presentation entitled "Chestnut 101" or "Chestnut for Dummies", a fanciful review and introduction for beginners to TACF's approach to solving chestnut blight by backcross breeding. He also explained how state chapters contribute to creating a healthy chestnut variety that will thrive in the forests of Massachusetts and Rhode Island by capturing the genes of local mother trees.

President Jamie Donalds updated members on the National Annual Meeting in West Virginia and highlights from the breeding programs in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The MA/RI Chapter is at an exciting stage where many of its BC3 F1 orchards will be challenged with blight and trees will be selected to continue in the breeding program. This step of the breeding process demands coordination and member power for inoculation, selection and roguing of orchards. Plans are moving forward to secure "seed orchard" space for the next phase of the TACF breeding program. These seed orchards will eventually produce the nuts we can use to reintroduce chestnut to the forests.



Brad Smith presents "Chestnut for Dummies"
Photo: Kathy Desjardin



Attendees inspect the BC3F3 seedlings
Photo: Brad Smith

Brad Smith's "Chestnuts in Italy" shared vacation photos from the Viterbo and Monte Cimino region of Italy. By complete accident Brad stumbled upon one of the largest chestnut producing areas of Italy. On a four hour quest Brad found chestnut orchards, wild forests, wild seedlings, sawmills, coppice wood, honey experimentation and lumber production. How the European tree has survived blight and root rot and how it differs from the American variety was discussed.



Mature Italian Chestnut
(Castanea Sativa)
Photo: Brad Smith

TACF TRIP TO CHINA

Sara Fitzsimmons, Northern Appalachian Regional Science Coordinator, delivered the keynote address "TACF goes to China" in which she described her trip to China to examine the ecology of the chestnut blight and the reforestation potential of the Chinese chestnut species as a forest type tree. Members of the team included Songlin Fei, Fred Hebard, Fred Paillet and Kim Steiner. After arriving in Beijing, they drove south into a chestnut area. There has been some work on the range limits of these plants. Chestnuts are vital to the economy of this region since they have been cultivating these trees for thousands of years. There are three species in China, including Mollissima, Henryi and Seguinii. Songlin Fei did a presentation at the National Annual Meeting about the diversity of Chinese species and their distribution. Seguinii is described as a short ever blooming species, but what they saw was quite the opposite. These trees were 80 or 90 feet tall. The Henryi has very small nuts and is great for wildlife but not much of a nut crop for human consumption. They hope to go back to collect more samples, to bring our material over there to test it, and to explore more about blight resistance. Is there Chinese material that is more blight resistant and consistent with American Chestnut forest growth which we could use in our breeding program? A second trip is planned to build on the contacts made and to further our research.



Michael Novack and Jamie Donalds frame B3F3 Plaque
Photo: Kathy Desjardin