



Thirty-eight Years of Bonsai Education and Volunteerism - 1970 - 2009

## President's Corner - Chuck Croft

By now each of you is involved in getting your bonsai out of winter storage, cleaning pots and trees, repotting and spring pruning. This is a very active season for bonsai enthusiasts. For many of us, this is the most active season of the year. Added to everything else is all the preparation for the local club spring shows and our PBA Spring Festival at the U.S. National Arboretum. It all makes for a very busy time, and I sometimes wonder when I had time to work before I retired!

I look forward each year to the PBA Spring Festival which is the realization of the great efforts and collaboration between the US National Arboretum, the National Bonsai Foundation, and PBA. I particularly enjoy this event because I get to see trees from other members of PBA clubs that I don't normally see during the course of the year. The Spring Festival presents a great opportunity to observe and to learn from other PBA members as well as from the comments and questions by the viewing public. I learn something new every year even if it is only a different way to look at a tree. Often I learn the most when trying to explain something to a viewer who has no bonsai experience. It has been said that one doesn't really know their subject, no matter what it is (or how complicated), until they can explain that subject to an individual with no knowledge of the subject. This often becomes the best opportunity for each of us to coalesce our thoughts into explainable concepts.

I looked forward to last year's PBA Spring Festival with the speakers we had and the expansion of the

Spring Festival. I look forward, also, to this year's Spring Festival with David DeGroot and David Kreutz as our speakers and workshop leaders. We also have the first PBA Regional Juried Show as part of our Spring Festival. Most of the trees in the Juried Show are from PBA members, as we would expect, but we also have an exhibitor from New York taking part. It is our hope that this trend will continue in the future and that we will continue to have good representation across our PBA membership but that we will also pull in exhibitors from outside PBA. It is, also our hope that we will continue to be able to have speakers and workshops and to expand the educational opportunities available to PBA.

One thing I particularly enjoy and look forward to each year is working with the National Bonsai Foundation and the U.S. National Arboretum to jointly plan and host the annual Spring Bonsai Festival. PBA owes a large debt of gratitude to both organizations for their assistance and participation in this event. I hope to see all of you avail yourselves of the opportunities to learn at our PBA Spring Festival and look forward to seeing you at the U.S. National Arboretum. Enjoy the Festival!

## PBA Auction -- May 30, 2009 New Date!!

Spring has brought a new vigor to bonsaists everywhere. What better way to share the spirit than to bring some material that others may find useful. This is a great time to do some Spring cleaning and maybe to pick up some new ideas or products for future use. Anyone can buy by getting a bidder card and any PBA member can list items for sale, see Ed upon entry for lists and corresponding numbered item cards.

Behnke's Nursery in Beltsville has once again given us their seminar room above the small building north of the main entrance. Just two miles north of the Beltway on the left hand side, parking is available in the back.

There are usually pre-bonsai material, somewhat finished products, wire, books, tools, pots and much camaraderie to be had. Please feel free to volunteer wherever needed as runners (bringing items to the auctioneer and to the "sold" area), recorders (during the event) and carriers (for those of us who are "fire escape challenged") after the auction.

Please bring checks (make them out to PBA) or cash, as we are not set up for credit card purchases. Parking and setup are from 8 to 9AM; registering item lists with cards as well as bidder card registration is from 9 to 10AM; with the auction from 10 to Noon. Many thanks to all who have made this fund raiser for the PBA such a success each year. Let us know how this week after Memorial Day weekend works for you and if you would prefer any other date. See you there!

## Bonsai from Air Layering - Peter Jones



If you look closely, you can see the wire and the mark it left while it was cutting off the nutrient flow. This wire was put on in the spring of the year. This branch was girdled on January 16, 2003. The knife was clean and dipped in Roy's mix of Lysol and water. Please note that the cambium is removed down to the xylem.



Notice how the callus has developed. You can also see how the twin trunk is thicker than the area below the girdle. It is believed that the callus area has more nutrients, hence better rooting.

## SPRING OPEN HOUSE & SALE

Saturday, May 9, 2009

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Plastic is wrapped over the girdled area so that it won't dry out. The branch will continue to send nutrients down, trying to heal over the girdled area. In wrapping the girdled area one should overlap the top and bottom area of the bark. You want the plastic airtight.

Dambowicz's words of encouragement and sharing their knowledge about *Pinus thunbergii* 'Nishiki tsukasa', in time I successfully did an air layer in 1981. Jules Koetsch, David, and Bill, encouraged me to continue my grafting and propagation work, so others could obtain choice and outstanding trees to develop as bonsai. I feel truly blessed to have known Bill and David, and

plan to visit Jules and Jane when time permits. Now that I am getting very close to my seventh decade of life, I will put more effort in caring for the trees that I have and only propagate those trees that interest me.

After that success, my confidence level was high enough that I wanted to do air layers on a *Pinus parviflora* that I had purchased from Joe Burke. Joe was one of the first to collect *Pinus parviflora* and to graft them as well as one of the first to graft 'Nishiki tsukasa' on the East Coast. I have since learned how *Pinus thunbergii* 'Nishiki tsukasa' first came to this country and the East Coast. I had met Joe Burke at a PBA's fall symposium in 1980. Joe was one of the few people in the USA that grafted *parviflora* to *thunbergii*. After sharing my success with him, he encouraged me to try root crown grafting. I will write about that learning experience some other time.

In many of the bonsai magazines, one often sees articles where air layering is used to shorten a bonsai or to air layer a branch for a new bonsai. For years I have wanted to develop a black pine with some character in the trunk. I had air layered a black pine and

In 1976 my dear friend, Bill Daly, convinced me to try various methods of propagation to grow plants for Bonsai training. We developed an agreement that as we were successful in propagation, we would share plants with each other so that if one of us lost a plant, we would still have a plant to propagate from. Part of our gentleman's agreement was that we would research and learn various methods of propagation, as we obtained rare and choice plant materials. Bill passed away in 2003 and I truly miss him.

In 1978 Cliff Pottberg gave me a *Pinus thunbergii* 'Nishiki tsukasa' with the understanding that the first 3 branches I air layered would be his as payment for this choice tree. Although I had successfully air layered a *Picea glauca* branch, *Pinus thunbergii* was a new challenge and that it was a 'Nishiki tsukasa' made it more challenging. After gaining some experience with growing this tree for a few years, some branches had developed that I thought I could air layer.

First lesson learned, don't try to air layer any branch smaller than 3/8 of an inch. Knowing how expensive this tree is, I didn't want to chance killing it because of lack of experience. Thanks to Bill Merritt's and David

planted it in the ground for five years, which developed some interesting branches. One branch had nice character so I decided to let it grow and develop for a new trunk. While developing this branch as a new trunk, the secondary branches were kept very short, so that they would be in scale with the new trunk. In developing a tree like this, one must keep the secondary branches under control to avoid having branches that are too long. With the character of the new trunk and the branches that are presently there, one should be able to use John Naka's black pine technique to develop a nice black pine Bonsai in a few years.

I showed this tree to our club at our August 2006 meeting on propagation. Bill Orsinger was doing a program on propagation and had asked me to speak about some of my air layering experience. I showed the pine that I had been growing with the plan to air layer a branch to develop as a bonsai. What I was trying to show is how one can get a tree with a nice trunk and good taper in a few years. The technique that I have developed doubles the size of the trunk in a few years after it is cut from the parent tree. When I spoke about the history of this tree and my plans, I asked if anyone had an idea as to where the air layer should be done. Joe Gutierrez correctly identified the area that the air layer should be done.

Since the area where the air layer would be done is about 4 inches thick and bark had formed, I used a saw to cut to the cambium, inserted a steel wire and tightened it. This was done on August 14, 2006. On December 16, 2006, I girdled the area about 1 inch wide



I normally want the plastic long enough to go around the girdled area 5 times to ensure an airtight seal. If air gets under the plastic, it can kill the part you wish to have as a new tree. While holding the plastic in place, foil is used to wrap the plastic and girdled area to keep out sunlight and to hold the plastic in place.



The foil is wrapped several times and then tied to keep Mr. Blue Jay from stealing the foil for his nest. The first week of April the foil and plastic are removed and moist long fiber sphagnum moss, 3 to 5 times the thickness of the girdle area is used to cover the girdle and that is covered with plastic, to keep the area moist.

and covered it with plastic and foil. Normally, in April of '07 I would have wrapped the girdled area in long fiber sphagnum moss, but because of health issues I didn't get to wrap the girdled area until April of '08. Like most things in life, long fiber sphagnum moss also has a shelf life, so I would encourage you to purchase fresh sphagnum moss when you wish to air layer a plant. I use my old (one year old) sphagnum moss to cover seed flats when I plant seeds. Using old sphagnum moss for air layering may not promote good root growth. Like lifeless soil, plants won't grow in soil that has no nutrients.

During the 2008 growing season, this tree was fed heavily with Peruvian seabird guano and by August of '08 the girdled area had developed roots but I didn't feel that they were enough for me to cut the air layer off, so in November a pot with soil was placed over the sphagnum moss so that the roots could continue to grow. As part of the air layering program in March of '09, I will show this tree if any one is interested in seeing it. This air layer will be cut off after I do an air layer lecture at the Brookside Bonsai Club in April. By then it should be well on its way so that wiring can be done in 2010.

The second tree I will show at our March '09 meeting is the *Pinus thunbergii* 'Nishiki tsukasa' twin trunk that I started working on in 2001. One branch produced 2 candles of equal size and length. To create some movement, I wired both candles while they were green. To help develop a good area for air layering, I put a wire around the area where I wanted roots to de-

velop and tightened it until it cut off the nutrients flowing to the roots. By doing so the cambium builds up a callus of nutrients, which helps roots to develop. Experience has taught me that after cutting off the air layer this callus continues to develop making a good base, and with proper care, many roots will develop giving the new tree a good base.

Air layering of *Pinus thunbergii*, 'Nishiki tsukasa' must be done before the cork bark develops. Once corking starts to form, the cambium becomes thinner and the tree won't develop a good callus to produce roots. In January of '03 I removed the wires and girdled the area where I wanted roots to develop. In April of '04, long fiber sphagnum moss was soaked and the excess water removed and the girdled area was wrapped with this moss. This moss was then covered with a clear plastic. By July of '04 enough roots had developed for me to cut the twin cork bark pine off and plant it in a pot.



*Pinus thunbergii*: This is the tree before the air layering process was started. It was about 7 1/2 feet tall. You can see a big branch was removed to make the air layer area easier to reach.

Many years ago I had shown Roy Nagatoshi my method/technique of air layering pines, so that I would get a nice trunk. Roy liked the results he saw and encouraged me to write about my experience. Now that I have pictures showing each step, I hope this write up will encourage others to develop their own technique for air layering trees or branches to develop a bonsai. Although I have many black pines that I have developed using this method, I will only show a few at our March meeting. It is too much work moving all of my air-layered pines to the Center.



*Pinus thunbergii*: Preparing the area for air layering. This was done on August 14, 2006

What did I learn from this experience? That understanding the growth requirements of the tree one wishes to develop as a bonsai is most important. Understanding how a tree grows in our area and under ones care before trying to develop a bonsai will prevent failure. I encourage you to read up on the tree you wish to have as a bonsai before you sink a lot of money into it, only to watch it die. The 5 minute conversation with others at our meeting is a start, if you take notes. Putting to practice the techniques that you have read about may be the best way for you to learn. Bonsai is not a one-day affair, but years of training and developing using various techniques that others have developed. Please keep in mind that each of us has our own way of growing plants. We must take the techniques that we read about and develop them to our own horticulture methods of gardening.



*Pinus thunbergii*: The wire was used to stop the flow of nutrients and to start the air layering process. I did not want to girdle in August because the tree would bleed sap, which would weaken the tree. By using the wire there was little to no sap lost.

Start with small plants that don't cost too much. If you like pines, buy a small young tree and watch it grow for a few years. Read up on the tree so you will have an idea of what you can expect as far as growth. Practice removing candles, notice how the tree grows after you remove candles. Notice how many times your pine produces candles in a 12 month growing season. Most people kill pines with too much tender loving care.

Find a club member that is willing to teach you what he/she has learned. Do not look for instant success it takes years to develop a good bonsai. All of us have lost plants so don't feel bad if your plant dies. Please remember that plants do die. Keep notes so you don't repeat mistakes.



Pinus thunbergii: On December 16, 2006, the wire was removed and girdling was done. Notice how the tree was trying to heal the cut with the wire in it.



Pinus thunbergii: Girdling almost done. The wire took some effort to get it out. The bark above the wire was removed to allow the callus area to come in contact with the moss.



Pinus thunbergii: The finished girdle wrapped in plastic and covered with foil. This process was completed on 12-16-06. Moist sphagnum moss was not put on the tree until April of '08.

After years of air layering to increase my stock of good size black pines, I can now enjoy developing them in bonsai training pots. My next task is to graft side branches on to some of the pines I have air layered. After reading about branch grafting to improve a bonsai, now I have enough materials that I can practice branch placement by grafting.

I hope my experiences will encourage you to try various methods of training and developing a bonsai. It is important that you have fun in this learning process.

Good Luck!



## Commune with Sensei Sam

by Jim Sullivan (Baltimore)

This column invites questions, or contrary experiences, methods, or information. Send your thoughts to Sensei Sam at [jvjsullivan@aol.com](mailto:jvjsullivan@aol.com). Your questions or responses can appear in *Clippings* anonymously if you prefer.

### *Sensei Learns a New Word*

As I write this, thunderstorms are approaching that will probably put an end to an already declining display of cherry blossoms. The beautiful and famous display at the Tidal Basin and the lesser, but also beautiful displays in many neighborhoods in and around Washington are admired by millions, if only for a brief time. A newspaper article about the cherry blossoms contained the Japanese word *Hanami*, which translates as "To look at flowers". I don't think I have seen a flowering cherry bonsai in all the many shows and symposia sponsored by PBA or other bonsai organizations. I have seen some very nice flower-

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the fall. This has become my new act of *Hanami* and I don't have to worry if this "blooming" of a tree promised for the spring show will in fact have any flowers left when the doors open.

-Sensei Sam

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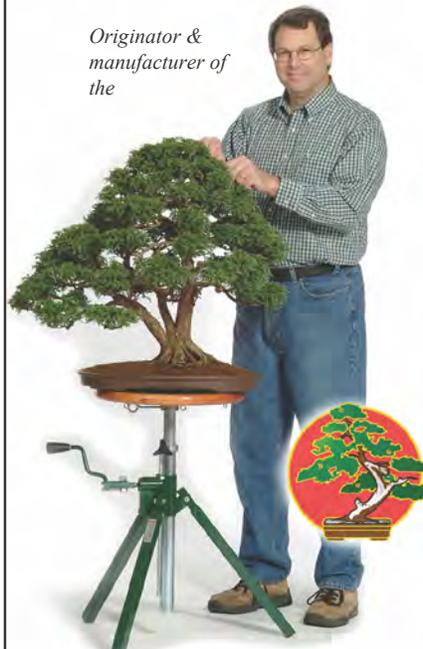
ing cherry bonsai in PBA members' collections, but the bloom time does not coincide with show time. Nor does the bloom time of many other flowering bonsai, some too early such as pear, cherry, redbud, some azaleas. Sometimes even lilac and apple are spent by show time. The satsuki azaleas are too late to be included in most spring shows if *Hanami* is the focus. A number of years ago I was determined to display a collected redbud in bloom at the PBA Spring Show, even though the bloom period would normally be over by the end of April - show time. I removed all the shelves from a spare refrigerator and kept the large redbud in a sort of suspended state for three weeks until show time. I think it made a stunning (and unusual) addition to the annual display. In most cases the ephemeral displays of our flowering bonsai are enjoyed in private, or shared with a few bonsai friends or curious neighbors, not at shows. While the act of *Hanami* is critical to some bonsai enthusiasts, and anxiety over bloom/show time is real, I have come (very late) to accept the flow of nature. In addition to real flowers, I now observe more carefully the subtle color changes in emerging and maturing leaves and the reversal of those changes in

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## Potomac Bonsai Association Membership Application

Welcome! PBA is composed of the clubs listed to the right. Join one and be eligible to attend any club's meeting in addition to receiving the *PBA Clippings* on a quarterly basis. We present a Spring Bonsai Festival and an annual auction, as well as other events. Residents of club communities are expected to join a club to receive all membership benefits, including *PBA Clippings*.

**To become a member**, call the contact person of the club convenient to your location for the current rate and where to send this application and the dues (Please make the check payable to the club you are joining). Individual clubs set their own dues. Check for Beginner's hour and other functions. Meeting locations, times and club contact numbers (for additional information) are subject to change. We suggest that you call before sending in your membership application.

**Individuals residing beyond commuting distance** of a club are invited to subscribe to *PBA Clippings*. For a subscription only (does not include entitlement to participate in club events), complete this application and mail with a check payable to PBA to Ross Campbell, 728 Guilford Ct., Silver Spring, MD., 20901-3218.

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### Type of Membership:

- Individual club membership (includes *PBS Clippings*)
- Family club membership (One *PBA Clippings* subscription per household)
- PBA Clippings* only, US \$20.00 (does not include club activities)
- PBS Clippings*, International subscription, US \$35.00 (E-mail version, \$15)

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Circle one of the following Association activities with which you can help:

Membership	Club Library	Exhibit Planning	Newsletter Staff
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How did you find out about PBA? \_\_\_\_\_

## 2009 PBA Board Meeting Schedule

The schedule of PBA Board Meetings is listed here. Please note that these meetings are **not** closed meetings and that every PBA member is invited to attend. Normally, each member club is represented by the club President or their designated representative. The schedule for 2009 then, is:

19 July  
13 September  
15 November

## PBA Member Clubs

**Baltimore Bonsai Club**, 4th Sunday, 1 pm, Towson Branch of Baltimore Public Library; Arschel Morell, (410)744-6478, ajmorellsr14@aol.com

**Bonsai Society of the Eastern Shore**, 1st Wednesday, 7 pm, Talbot Hospice, Easton, Susan Jones-Armari, (410)943-9886, susanja@bcctv.com

**Brookside Bonsai Society**, 3rd Thursday, 7:30 pm, North Chevy Chase Rec Ctr, Bethesda, MD, Jim Hughes, (301)779-2891, jim6909@msn.com

**Chesapeake Bonsai Society**, Call for meeting time and location, Sharon Katz, (410)263-3307, sharonkatz@excite.com

**Kiyomizu Bonsai Club**, 4th Sunday, 2 pm, Clearwater Nature Center, 11000 Thrift Rd, Clinton, MD, Essie Wilson, (301)839-2471, wilson@howrey.com

**Lancaster Bonsai Society**, 2nd Wednesday, 7 pm, Conestoga House, 1608 Marietta Pike, Lancaster, PA, Bob Ulrich, (717)468-6458, LancasterBonsai@yahoo.com

**Mid-Shore Bonsai Society**, Saturday meetings TBA, Adkins Arboretum, Ridgley, MD, Kris Doherty, (410)778-6662

**Northern Virginia Bonsai Society**, 2nd Saturday, 9 am, Walter Reed Community Center, 2909 16th St South, Arlington, VA, Jack FitzSimons, jfitzsimons@verizon.net

jmschwartz@comcast.net

**Potomac Viewing Stone Group**, Meets irregularly (~ 6 times per year), Glenn Reusch, (540)672-5699, Ghreusch@aol.com,

**Rappahanock Bonsai Society**, Call for meeting time and location, Todd Stewart, (804)448-4499

**Washington Bonsai Club**, 3rd Saturday, 2 pm, Call first (no July or August meetings), U.S. National Arboretum, Washington, D.C., Ross Campbell, (301)587-6898

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### *PBA Clippings*

#### Newsletter of the Potomac Bonsai Association

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**Subscriptions:** PBA member Clubs/Societies: Annual subscription is included in the membership dues paid to the PBA club or society of your choice. Telephone numbers of points of contact for information about any member club or society and its annual dues are listed above.

**Non-member Subscriptions:** Individuals residing within the metropolitan areas of our clubs are encouraged to become members of a club to receive the newsletter. Annual subscription for 4 Quarterly issues of the PBA Clippings only is US \$20.00 (US \$35.00 for international mail) which should be made payable to the Potomac Bonsai Association and sent to Ross Campbell, 728 Guilford Ct., Silver Spring, MD., 20901-3218.

**Advertising Rates:** Annual rates: 1/4 page, \$100.00; Larger than 1/4 page are accepted. Direct inquiries/payment (make checks payable to Potomac Bonsai Association) to Thomas Kodiak, see below. Please send paper ad copy or articles to the editor: Thomaskodiak@gmail.com  
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