

2012 KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Beautiful Landscapes: The Key to Healthy Communities

KATY MOSS WARNER



Katy Moss Warner

*President Emeritus, American Horticultural Society
Board Member and City Judge, American in Bloom*

Welcome to you all. Why are so many people standing in the back of the room when there are so many seats up front? Come on; it's like church—come right to the front!

Thank you, Juanita, it's really wonderful to be here. I have a couple of confessions to make. One is that I've been practicing horticulture in the state of Florida for a very long time, but as you can probably tell from my accent I'm not from Florida. Even though I've been here for a long time, now over 30 years, I've never been a member of the Florida State Horticultural Society. So I apologize; I will change that, but I also know that many of you have never seen me because I don't know you—so I would also say it's going to be a mutual thing. I said to Richard last night, "Why have you never met me? I've been here in the state for over 30 years; why have you never met me?" So it goes both ways, I never met him either.

And, another kind of apology I have is to Juanita's father. I was very intrigued by her description of his reference to Walt Disney World because I do remember his first and only visit very, very well. He came and I was so proud of all the new flowering trees we had growing on our tree farm at the time. I was very proud because I had done an internship at Fairchild Tropical Garden. He had a fabulous collection of tababulias that he had brought in, a whole field full of these tababulias, and I was so proud that we had some growing here in central Florida. How many of you know what a tababulia is? (*show of hands from the audience*) Oh, you're a good group. So, anyway, there I was showing John Popenoe this fabulous tree farm, and he couldn't have cared less! He wanted to go into the native woods in back of my tree farm. He thought that what we were doing in terms of cultivating horticulture was for the birds! and he really wanted to get into the native area and

check out what we had there. So that was my experience with John Popenoe's love for cultivating horticulture. But it also directed my attention to the fact that I needed to really look at the native part of our landscape and, in fact, before I left Disney I was responsible for all the environmental initiatives at Walt Disney World, which included protection of our natural resources. And many people would comment to me: "Disney's just destroying the environment, doing terrible things to the environment." And I would say "You know it's interesting, we have 30,000 acres and we have dedicated at Walt Disney World (at that time) 50% of that land in perpetuity as natural native lands." And I said, "How many of you, in your home garden, dedicate one half your land or in your business, one half of your land to native natural. Very few, and so I think it's a huge contribution that Disney has made and continues to make for our state. Anyway, that's on the side; now I'll get to the real stuff.

I was asked to speak today about a very important part of ornamental horticulture, which is essentially the people-plant relationship. I remember the very first time I gave this particular kind of talk—this idea of connection between people and plants—for the American Horticultural Society (AHS), which is a comparable organization, I think, to the Florida State Horticultural Society. And this was the first time that they had done a presentation with a section on people-plant relationships and the research associated with those relationships. There were speakers from all over the world speaking on the research associated with this specific topic. I was surprised to find out how much research there was. I came with some of the research we had done at Walt Disney World but I was really truly surprised at how much was available. And so I thought that might be what I share with you today.

Beautiful Landscapes: The Key to Healthy Communities

Before we get started, I thought you might help me a little bit with my dull research (and I'm not a researcher). Did you all get one of these little cards? Show me, show me if you got cards. Good, now if you put the other hand up we can get some energy going in the room (*laughter in the room*). Up, okay, there we go, now ... if you don't have a little card, put your hand up, because I need research from everybody, okay. If you could pull a pen out, or a pencil, and on this card at the top, put your favorite town or city in Florida; this is a very horticultural question, your favorite town or city. Please put that at the top and then put a little 1, 2, 3 under it and give me three reasons why that is your favorite town or city. This is not a rhetorical question; I'm not expecting any specific answers. It's research, just pure research, three reasons why you love that particular town or city. And, then if you could put down—and I apologize if this imposes on your personal connections—at the bottom the city or the town where you live. Okay? The town or city where you live, okay? Is everybody ready? You got it? Did you put the three down there? Three reasons? I need it now, it's important for my research; you know how you depend on people to give you data. I'm looking for data here.

Now, just to give me a sense of who is in the audience, how many of you are involved with ornamental horticulture? How many of you are involved with vegetables? And how many of you are involved with fruit? And, yes, citrus is fruit (*laughter from the audience*), is that the question, I heard someone ask the question. Okay, how many of you are involved with more than two of those? Okay, so, I think I got it. So how many of you are not involved in any of those? Okay, there are a few. How many are students? How many of you are researchers? How many of you are none of those? Okay, again, oh yes, extension agents, how many of you are extension agents? Okay, I think I got it. Hold onto those cards, I need them. If you don't mind bringing them to me at the end and put them on this table, I would really appreciate it. Again, as researchers you know how important this is.

The Malady of "Plant Blindness"

In America, the past few years we have suffered a pretty serious malady in our country. I know, not just one; you were going to tell me that, I know. But we have definitely suffered one that I'm going to address and interestingly enough in this particular malady we're not alone; research showed that England is also challenged with this same malady. The malady is called "plant blindness." How many of you have heard of plant blindness? Some of you have, I see. In 2001, there was research done by Wandersee and Schussler, who defined the term "plant blindness" as the "inability to see or notice the plants in one's own environment, leading to the inability to recognize the importance of plants in the biosphere and in human affairs." How many of you think that's a serious problem? Yes, I do, too; I was surprised when I learned of this research.

"Additionally, it is the inability to appreciate the aesthetic and unique biological features of plants and the misguided anthropocentric ranking of plants as inferior to animals and leading to the erroneous conclusion—you know researchers, they have to use big words—"... leading to the erroneous conclusion that plants are unworthy of human consideration" (Wandersee and Schussler, 1998). Now these are plant researchers doing this work. The authors and researchers claim that "we are not only plant blind but natural beauty blind. We just don't see the landscape

that surrounds us anymore." That is a pretty serious statement and one that I honestly, truly questioned. How could this happen? Really, people see plants. And why would it happen?

Well, their research calls on various social and educational biases as well as human anatomical realities in terms of how the eye works and the human brain reacts with the eye to filter the information. Part of Schussler's research determined interestingly enough that people prefer to view objects that are between 0 and 15 degrees above and below eye level. Think about it: in our A.J. Downing American landscape of big trees and lawns, what do we see when we look out at a landscape, if we prefer to see what's in front of us 15 degrees up and 15 degrees down? Very interesting in terms of research on human and plant interactions—basically we don't really see them.

So I questioned this. I said "Okay, based on my own personal experience, how does this resonate; does this really say anything?" I would encourage you to think back on your own personal experiences and see how this research relates to things that you've experienced. Well, I remember in 1976 when I went to Walt Disney World, I was really impressed with the quality of the horticulture there. The entrance road was amazing, introducing you to quality horticulture, the sand of Florida, the palm trees of Florida, colors of the oleanders—I thought it exquisite. The Polynesian Hotel, the Magic Kingdom, these were really superb examples of landscaping. And I was pleased that millions of people every year would be exposed to the importance of plants and gardens. However, when we surveyed our guests at that time and asked them why they really liked Walt Disney World, how many of you have been to Walt Disney World? How many of you have not been to Walt Disney World? Oh my gosh! One person!

When we asked: why is it that you really liked going to Walt Disney World? The top two answers were: friendliness of the people and cleanliness. I guess those are the things closest to God. But they didn't say landscaping and they didn't say the beauty of the natural environment.

I was on a mission. I was going to get those people to say the "garden" word. I was going to get them to recognize that one of the things, it wasn't just about being clean ... it was about beauty. Because they didn't have that "beauty" word in their vocabulary, they didn't have a "garden" word in their vocabulary, they knew "clean." So, we were on a mission.

We knew that our guests felt good in those environments, they just didn't have the vocabulary to be able to communicate what it was. And they didn't have the vocabulary for themselves, so they weren't going to go back home and say what made me feel good was the fact that there was beautiful trees and beautiful gardens. So we were missing our opportunity. So that was one thing that I remembered when I heard about this research, I remembered that at that time 14 million people didn't know that it was plants in their environment that was making them feel good.

The second thing that kind of resonated with me was that in 2005 a journalist named Richard Louv wrote a book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-deficit Disorder*. How many of you know this book? A few of you—well, we should all know it. It's an important book, introducing us to the concept of "nature deficit disorder" in kids in America. And the author shared an interesting fact. He shared the fact (and it was shocking to me) that it was not video games, computers, and TV that were the root of the problem. How many of you believe that that is the root of the problem? (*Laughter*) I just told you, it's not, how could you possibly raise your hand. (*Laughter*)

Okay, those are not the root of the problem. So what is the root

of the problem for kids?—teachers and parents, shocking. Teachers and parents are the root of the problem. Why? Because they are increasingly preventing kids from going outdoors. Because outdoors is a scary place, so we keep kids inside and encourage them to watch TV, use their computers, and play video games. It's not necessarily their natural predilection. Adults are encouraging that and they're making outdoors a scary place. TV is bringing whatever nature they watch on TV up close and personal so that kids, especially urban kids, think tigers come out of shrubbery everywhere. Think about it, if you were a kid, wouldn't you think that? Okay, so what ends up happening is, that these kids not only grow up blind to plants, they grow up frightened of the outdoor environment. Do you know kids like that? I do. I have a very dear friend who had a child in nursery school up in Massachusetts outside of Boston and she said she was furious that the school—a nursery school—had the kids go outside in the wintertime to play on the playground. She was furious. How could they possibly be in their right mind? And I said "Jill, that's what they make clothes for, of course kids have got to go outside. In the heat, in the cold, we've got to take care of them, but of course they need to go outside." But increasingly, teachers are afraid and parents are afraid of allowing kids that opportunity (Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*).

Then in 2007, the *Washington Post* did an interesting test. It wasn't a horticultural test, but it was a very important one to me about people's perceptions, tastes and priorities. And it resonated with me when I reflected upon this research about plant blindness. Some of you might have seen this, on the internet.

A Violinist in the Metro

A man sat at a metro station in Washington, DC, and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousands of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

Three minutes went by and a middle-aged man noticed there was musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried up to meet his schedule.

A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip: a woman threw the money in the till and without stopping continued to walk.

A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again. Clearly he was late for work.

The one who paid the most attention was a 3-year-old boy. His mother tagged him along, hurried, but the kid stopped to look at the violinist. Finally the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only six people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk at their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars.

Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston, with ticket prices averaging \$100.

This is a real story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the Metro station was organized by the *Washington Post* as part of a social

experiment about the perception, taste, and priorities of people. The outlines were: in a commonplace environment at an inappropriate hour: Do we perceive beauty? Do we stop to appreciate it? Do we recognize the talent in an unexpected context?

So, how many of you believe that this speaks to the role we have in beautifying our environment? How important is beauty in context? How much do we have to announce that we are creating beauty and stop to appreciate it? How much can we just take for granted that what we've created is going to be perceived? And I would offer that if Joshua Bell playing some of the most important music of our time on his Stradivarius isn't recognized by people walking by, our landscapes and our gardens are going to have some more challenges. So that was another important piece for me in believing that this research is really worth paying attention to.

And then I did my own personal test. I had just gone up to the Washington, DC area, to Alexandria, VA specifically. The American Horticultural Society has a beautiful 26-acre piece of land that was one of George Washington's original farms. So if you ever get up to the Washington area, I encourage you to go to the American Horticultural Society; it's a wonderful place to visit, and you can walk right down to the Potomac River.

So here I am in Alexandria and I am a strong believer that almost every city in America feels the need to have the ugliest street. I am a confirmed believer. That's the one that has all the big boxes on it; we make no attempt to landscape it and no attempt to make it attractive. Almost every city, I go through a lot of communities in Florida—we are just as bad in Florida. You can be anywhere; I was up in Charleston, VA, driving into the old part of the city, here's the street ... could have been anywhere in America. Okay, so every city seems to like these streets.

Well in Alexandria, Route 1 is one of these streets, ugliest street in America. Speedway in Tucson, AZ, ugliest street in America. I mean I could just list them all, they are just amazing. So here I had read in the newspaper that there were major plans to improve the aesthetics of Route 1. I was pretty excited, I thought "... this is amazing; maybe, just maybe, I'll see an example of how to improve the ugliest streets in America. This would be great!" So I decided to go over to see for myself what I could see. So, I started off and I started driving and I'm going by WalMart, I'm going by the fast food places, I'm driving down looking for this landscape. I drove 5 miles and was surprised that I couldn't see what they were talking about. Where were the new plantings? And I thought, "well, maybe I missed something; I'll go turn around and come back."

I turned around, drove back, and noticed something in the median. I had missed them. There were thirty 15-ft mature trees that just had been planted in the center median. I had totally missed them. TREES, big trees! Missed them and asked myself, am I plant blind? If there is anyone who sees plants, it's me! Am I plant blind? And then I said: is plant blindness truly an affliction that we need to address?

Is it an affliction that we need to address if we truly believe that we need to gain concern for plants, and for the role of plants, in our environment? So think about it, what are your personal stories? Do any of those things resonate with you? Are you blind to the plants in your environment? Because if we are going to solve this serious malady, we need to take some active steps, we need to know what can create the solution, right? Because we're problem solvers, we need to figure out the solution.

Well, first of all I think as we look at the solution, we need to look at what research is available that proves plants are of value because that's going to be part of the solution. So what research

is available? Well there is quite a bit and there is more coming now on the value of plants and quality landscapes. Some of you might know Dr. Charlie Hall, the active ecologist from Texas A&M University; he's doing a lot right now with the American Nursery and Landscape Association and he also works very closely with us at American Bloom; in fact, he sits on our Board. He's collected a lot of this research, and gives numerous talks on the social, environmental, and economical value of plants. In fact American Bloom just published this little booklet called "Discover the Surprising Side of Plants." I don't think I brought enough for everybody but I did bring quite a few and if you don't have this and would like it, I can certainly make sure that some are available.

So what is some of the research out there? Some of you might know what this research is, some of you might not, but there is research showing that quality landscape in urban environments (this work was done at the University of Illinois) reduced the crime rate. Okay, that's an important piece and it's very important when we're doing work in communities. There has been research done, also at the University of Illinois, on the value of plants to patients in hospitals. If patients can see plants out their window, or even if they have a picture of a plant hanging on the wall, their caregivers report that the patients appear to need less medication and healed faster. Hospitals all over the country are using that data, putting in roof gardens, and gardens outside, doing all kinds of things to provide a better healing environment.

We know from research that real estate, both residential and commercial, can get a significant bump in its value with quality landscaping. And I use the words "quality landscape" because it's not just putting a bunch of peat balls in front of the house, it really is about delivering a "quality" landscape whatever that may be and use extension agents, students, researchers, and designers to help to define that but it is about quality landscaping.

"Trees Overhead"—this research was done at Cornell University. Trees overhead on city streets slows traffic. You've probably been in communities where traffic is being slowed by roundabouts, by bumps, some cities use, in fact Winter Park, FL, re-bricked their whole city center to slow traffic. Tall trees overhead have been proven to slow traffic and the work was done in New York City by Cornell.

We know environmentally, it reduces heating and cooling bills, we know that plants provide food, they reduce pollutants in our houses, and office buildings reducing sick time in the work environment. We know that plant in landscaping of urban environments increases tourism, economic development and residential activity, and we know for school children that school gardens and quality landscapes in their environment improves concentration, boosts creativity and improved memory and better health.

So we know from research that plants have value. Now I'd like to offer to you 10 encouraging signs that I have seen that plant blindness is being addressed in our country and perhaps is being cured.

First, from my experience at Walt Disney World, where now 40 million people visit a year. Most of the people who come to Disney World are not people who love gardens and plants, unlike the public garden, where the audience is self-selected. We are not self-selected for plants and gardens, we are self-selected for castles and Mickey Mouse. Forty million people a year; most don't know that they love flowers and gardens, we knew we needed to do something that was as visually compelling as a mouse and a castle in order to be able to have people recognize that plants work in their environment and were valuable in their environment.

There were two major things that I would recommend as critically important in announcing that plants are important. I kind of call these the screamers. These are the ones that say, "man you can't miss them." Right? They're the screamers and these are flowers, dramatic flower beds placed right in front of your eyes so right on axis to draw the visitors in, hanging baskets put at eye level (remember the research said at 0, 15 and 15). Hanging baskets hit that mark. So, hanging baskets were really important to us, putting flowers in the right places, bright color, right combinations, in hanging baskets.

There are now over 500 flowering hanging baskets in the Walt Disney World complex. Huge commitment to hanging baskets. Did anyone use the garden word? Well when Michael Isner came to Disney World as our chief executive, and he welcomed all of the employees of Walt Disney World in front of the castle, there were thousands of us, he said the "garden" word. He actually used the word "garden" when he was itemizing the various things that he thought were unique about Walt Disney World.

I could have left then—I didn't—but I could have left then. But flowers announce that plants and gardens are important, that they open the eyes and what ends up happening is people see all the other green stuff they see the beautiful trees they see the lawn they see the waterways they see beauty around them.

In 1982, we opened Epcot and with that we opened "The Land" pavilion; we had a lot of pavilions at that time a lot of them. We had pavilions about technology, we had pavilions about the history of communication, we had lots of pavilions, we had all these countries from around the world. It was interesting and surprising to me that the most popular pavilion, no question about it, every person that came to Epcot went to this pavilion. You know what it was? The Land pavilion, absolutely. Why? Because, from my own personal perceptions, when people see vegetables in a garden, not so much fruit because many of those are on trees and they are up too high. When they see vegetables in a garden, they notice the plants around them. Vegetables function like flowers.

So community gardens are they important in communities, absolutely. In fact, Toledo, OH, was one of the cities I judged in America in Bloom. In Toledo they are using community gardens, and are looking for parcels of land at the entrance of neighborhoods, because they are using community gardens as the signpost of that neighborhood that this is a neat neighborhood where your neighbors take care of things and they are outside doing it because when you drive into that neighborhood you see people taking care of the vegetables. And why are vegetables kind of fun, because many of them have not been bred to be 6 inches tall like many of our bedding plants. So you have corn stalks, you have okra, you have a lot of things growing there that actually are that are at the 15-0-15. So vegetables, that opened my eyes to their value and we started incorporating them in the gardens, and at Walt Disney World also.

Another encouraging sign was the Epcot International Flower and Garden Festival at Disney. Have any of you been to the festival? Oh, I see, some of you have. Because I really, really wanted, and I was focused on the garden perceived as an attraction, not as custodial activity, which it is in many locations. Many gardens are seen as "just that stuff outside," many landscapes are just that stuff outside. Well we wanted it to be seen as something more than "that stuff outside." So when we were challenged to help generate revenue at Epcot with the festival, we said "okay, we'll try it. We're not sure it's going to work, but we'll try it."

We decided to try a European model, which is more than a 3-day or 4-day flower show. We decided to use a multi-week fes-

tival. We started that in 1994, it is now a major revenue producer, it's now I think 12 weeks long. Very, very focused use of flowers and topiary, by the way topiary is the third thing that people need to see in the garden, but I wouldn't encourage that. But here is a festival where people actually come to Epcot because of the gardens. So now we are getting a self-selecting group and the net profit there—they won't tell me exactly how much they make on it now—is definitely in the millions. Pretty impressive, the value of plants and gardens.

And the last thing I want to share with you from Walt Disney World—again this is one of my encouraging signs is what happened at Walt Disney World—is some of the research that was done in the mid-1990s. When one of our very brilliant industrial engineers decided to do a little bit of surveying knowing that 75% of the business at Disney was repeat visitation. It wasn't the first time visitor, it was the repeat visitor. All of the marketing was for the new visitor. No marketing was going to the returning visitor.

So he thought this is crazy, we need to be marketing to the returning visitor. So he was wondering what causes that visitor to come back. So he picked up a little bit of this survey, and they were looking for the key drivers, I don't know if they used Harris or Gallup, but they used one of the big polling companies and so it was all done with a professional survey process. And what they found out was the most important reason, key driver of return visitation was “atmosphere.”

What kind of a word, atmosphere. It wasn't a new attraction. It wasn't a new show, that's not why they came back. And that was important to know, because attractions were costing upwards of a \$100 million and depreciated over a longer period than you then you got an attendance bump. So, this was important! Atmosphere?! Well was it the smell of chocolate chip cookies, was that planet, what was that, ya know, what was that? Was it music, what was it? Turns out, guess what? What was it? (*from the audience: “It was the landscape.”*) Right, it was the landscape. The key driver of atmosphere was landscape, and atmosphere was the key driver of 75% of the business that was coming to Walt Disney World.

Well we were really, really important people for a short time, but I never forgot that. And most people have forgotten that fact, but I have never forgotten it and I think it's really important. How many of you live in communities where tourism is important? (*Show of hands from the audience*) Okay, a number of you do. Don't you think that that has relevancy? To repeat visitation. How many of you have retail shops, any of you have retail? If you're retail you are very dependent on loyalty and repeat visitation. Repeat customers, you depend on them. Well this data I think is very, very important for that information.

Okay, I'm going to go through some of these others a bit more quickly because I don't have quite as much personal experience with them but they're important.

The second encouraging sign for me is Michelle Obama's “Let's Move” movement. She has, more than anyone since Lady Bird Johnson, been able to get a focus on gardens in communities. Community gardens, school gardens, she's been doing it.

Third encouraging sign, Baby Boomers. How many of us are Baby Boomers? Huh, not very many? (*laughter*) Well! Oh my goodness. Well, we Baby Boomers, research has shown, as we retire are not looking for golf course communities. Did you know that? You know what we're looking for? (*From the audience: “The Beach,” followed by laughter*) Well yeah, some of us are looking for the beach. Baby Boomers research has shown are looking for walkable communities. Do you know why cities like DelRay Beach are redoing their main streets? Completely redoing streetscapes,

putting in benches, nice poles, landscaping, you know why they are doing that? Because they know that the research is showing that Baby Boomers will retire here if they provide walkable cities. Baby Boomers want walkable cities. That's encouraging. If you believe that golf courses are monocultures so we should not be lifting up in our environment then what we ought to be doing is choosing other kinds of environment for our retirement. And, walkable communities are evidently what we are looking for.

So here's another one. Number 4, another encouraging sign. There's a book written by a man named Dan Buettner, anyone know his work, his research? He did research on people who live the longest around the world, and wrote wrote a book called *The Blue Zones*. One of the things that was encouraging in that book is that people who live the longest live in communities where places to exercise outdoors is easy and inviting. That's a pretty interesting thing. Why would I would I ever read a book called *The Blue Zone*; well I am getting a little older and I may be interested in how to live the longest. OK?

How about number 5. Another interesting piece of research comes from Dr. Peter Tarlow, from Texas A&M, a specialist in security issues. He's a consultant all over the world on security issues. I asked another Texas A&M guy, Dr. Charlie Hall, “Do you know Dr. Peter Tarlow?” And, he said “No.” They're at the same exact university, you know what Peter Tarlow talks on regularly “Green Tourism is Beautiful Tourism” and he states “One of the least expensive ways to have lower crime rates is through beautification projects and from the perspective of tourism, beautification projects help the tourism industry grow by attracting more visitors, providing positive word-of-mouth publicity, creating an inviting environment that tends to lift the spirits of service personnel, and creates community pride.” This is a security guy, talking about the value of our plants.

NUMBER 6. PUBLIC GARDENS. Focus on good design and color in public gardens has caused public gardens to be true assets in the community and help to announce the value of plants and quality landscapes. How many of you visit public gardens in your area? (*Show of hands from the audience*) Pretty good sign, about half of you. I would encourage you, these are important places to find out if your research is working and if it's truly allowing people to see the plants in their environment.

Another positive sign is the American Horticulture Society (AHS) Youth Garden Symposium. As I mentioned, they actually sponsor the, and most important, national youth garden symposium in the country. If you're interested in information on it I have information. The symposium is in July. Use to be that this group would get together about 10 years ago and all they would do is fuss, fuss, fuss, fuss, fuss: I don't get any support; Everybody doesn't understand them; Oh I couldn't do anything, all that kind of fussing. Now it is one of the most energized and exciting symposia I go to because this group is now feeling like they can truly make a difference, and they are. So that was an encouraging sign.

I was encouraged, and I'm sorry to hear that the membership of this group has declined because we find as an encouraging sign that the American Horticulture Society membership has been increasing at a time when many not-for-profit organizations are decreasing. And to me that's a sign that people are seeing horticulture and plants in their environment as important things.

Another encouraging sign is related to this idea of functional landscapes. OK, if you haven't heard that term, that's an important term right now. In fact it would be a great track for a symposium, but anyway functional landscapes. When did architects ever care

about landscape? When did architects ever focus on more than three plants if they did design their own landscape? When did they ever broaden to really what was available? Well it's when they started doing green roofs. Green roofs and green walls are functional landscapes. Bioswales, rain gardens—there's a whole range of programs now.

In fact, out of the University of Florida, one of the functional things in a landscape was the fern that pulls arsenic. How many of you knew about that, the fern that pulls arsenic out of the soil? Right out of the University of Florida. Why is that important? Because we dumped a lot of arsenic in our soils when we used pressure-treated lumber in playgrounds across America. We have arsenic and of course gunpowder and all that stuff, but we put it in our playgrounds and one of the reasons I hate using those rubber tires in playgrounds is because I think we're going to have a similar problem with those stupid rubber chips. So please don't recommend them. But arsenic was important, and it is great that the University of Florida did that research. But functional landscapes, civil engineers, architects, and building maintenance professionals are all now talking about plants as solutions to global warming, to storm water issue to oxygenation, cleansing our urban environments, insulation, heat, and recreation. Green roofs, green gardens, bioswales, I've seen this whole idea of eco-sports, which is using natural corridors for sports rather than creating sports facilities. Landscapes have become recognized as functional as well as beautiful. Functional landscapes is a term of the future, I believe. People here, professional people, are helping to combat their own plant blindness.

America Bloom

But I believe in an organization called American Bloom, which offers one of our greatest opportunities. American Bloom collects best ideas from communities all over America. We've now judged more than 200 communities. We collect best ideas so other communities can replicate these best ideas. Have problems with people putting tires and crap in the front yards? Well get the BLANK busters from Junction City, KS, they'll help you. With their program they know how to get rid of motors hanging from Live Oak trees. Now I don't think many of you have a problem here in Florida, but in Junction City, KS, they had that problem and they needed a solution. So we collected the best ideas. "Are you laughing because you DOOO have that problem!?" OHHH! (*laughter from audience*). American Bloom reaches out to beyond our traditional garden enthusiast and touches lives of those that have not yet discovered the plants and the fun of plants.

Millions of lives have already been touched. We have a presence at the National League of Cities and the National Council of Mayors. These are places where plant people just don't exist. They don't even show in those big venues. You see lamppost people there, you see recycling trash container people there, but

you don't see any plant people at all. We're the only group that recognizes plants as important to urban environments in those particular venues. And these were mayors, governors, city managers, community leaders come to these meetings. That's whose there, we need to be influencing them. How many of you know your own mayor? (*Show of hands from the audience*) Oh, pretty good, pretty good. We all should know our community leaders, the city managers too, because they make significant decisions.

It is in our communities, in our parks, municipal landscapes, with our hanging baskets and street trees, with containers and green walls and green roofs, and school gardens and community gardens, at farmers markets and public gardens that we can truly touch everyone in our community with the importance of plants and the value of quality landscapes. I know some of you are into the fruit and vegetable research and you're probably thinking this is really about landscape people why am I sitting here listening? And I would say to you—and you know it yourselves—everyone of us lives in a community, everyone of us wants that community to be a place that we're proud of and it is the landscape. Some of it with your fruit trees, our vegetables, our flowers, our beautiful, beautiful Florida native trees as well as some of ones that are not native to our landscapes that can make a difference.

Perhaps some of you have watched "Dancing with the Stars" or "American Idol"; these programs encourage us all to value the importance of dance and music in our lives. "American Idol" has gotten upwards of... You know how many?...94 million votes for one show. Oh if we could have numbers like that, voting for plants! And beautiful landscapes in our communities. Could you imagine? Perhaps together we can, at least transform the communities in our own state.

I am looking to two other American Bloom judges from Florida to get as many Florida communities into American Bloom as soon as possible. We're really counting on 2013 as our big year! The Annual Symposium Awards Ceremony will be in Orlando. I really hope you will consider getting your community involved in American Bloom. That's why each one of you should have one of our participation guides. Please read it over; just don't tuck it away, then throw it away. Please look at it and see where it is that you can help us make a difference in our state.

What we're seeing is that American Bloom does transform communities through volunteerism and optimism. If plants cry "we're seeing it, we're seeing it" in everywhere I go. Communities with beautiful landscapes are places where people want to live, work, and play. Beautiful landscapes, and landscapes that include growing food are key to healthy, vibrant communities. They cure plant blindness.

I asked you in the beginning of the session to name your favorite town or city in Florida. If your favorite community is not where you live then I hope you will keep in touch and let me know how we can help you, how I can help you get your community involved so together we can make your community top of your list.

—Thank you.