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The North Carolina Arboretum Springs into Decade with New Offerings, Changes to Support Growth, Expansion

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (March 2, 2020) – The North Carolina Arboretum is springing into 2020 with an array of new offerings, additions and upgrades to support its growing organization. Since its inception in 1986, the 434-acre campus located just south of downtown Asheville in Pisgah National Forest has expanded its gardens, trails, educational programs and exhibits to serve more than 500,000 people annually. As the Arboretum enters its next decade of growth, it is excited to announce the addition of a new outdoor educational site, as well as several facility upgrades.

Willow Pond Opening Summer 2020

Thanks to generous donations from Arboretum Society members, donors, local businesses and foundations, the Arboretum is proud to announce the opening of its Willow Pond outdoor education site this summer. Originally created as a sediment collection basin during the Arboretum's initial construction period, this reinvigorated space is now home to a great diversity of wildlife, including the rare mole salamander. As part of the renovation, Willow Pond will contain three ponds, a newly constructed boardwalk and education pavilion, trails, art, as well as 4,000 newly planted native trees, shrubs and grasses. Featuring an abundance of salamanders, frogs, birds, insects and other wildlife, this hands-on learning space and recreation site will protect the environment, delight members and visitors, and educate students of all ages for many years to come. More details on Willow Pond's opening date and programming will be posted online at ncarboretum.org/willowpond.

National LEGO® Exhibit Returns in May

This May, the Arboretum is excited to welcome back the widely popular exhibit, Nature Connects®: Art with LEGO® Bricks by Sean Kenney. Featuring 14 larger-than-life sculptures created with nearly 500,000 LEGO Bricks, this family-friendly national traveling exhibit draws inspiration from the living world and combines play with science to create an inspiring intersection of education, entertainment and the environment. New sculptures include a five-foot tall colorful peacock, giant dragonfly and bonsai tree. The exhibit will be on display May 9 – August 2 throughout the Arboretum's gardens.

Landscape and Facility Upgrades

As part of its planning strategy, the Arboretum has already made some significant upgrades to its facilities and garden areas. In 2018 and 2019, the Arboretum renovated its Plants of Promise Garden by installing new irrigation and plants, created new educational interpretation panels and added 700 feet of additional paved pathways for improved accessibility. In addition, new LED lighting was recently installed throughout the Arboretum's core garden areas and main parking lot to improve safety, accessibility and enjoyment during the evening hours.

In addition to its horticulture and landscape improvements, the Arboretum is making several upgrades to its facilities, including its main parking lot and auxiliary bus parking lot. Beginning in March, the Arboretum's two parking lots will undergo a major renovation to add additional parking capacity, improve traffic flow and create a more sustainable stormwater runoff system. The project is expected to be complete in early summer and is made possible in part through a grant from the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority.

“We are excited about this next decade of growth and the many new offerings and exhibits coming to the Arboretum this season,” said George Briggs, executive director of The North Carolina Arboretum. “In the natural world, new growth often leads to new opportunities. With these new additions and upgrades, we hope to continue to grow our mission of connecting people, plants and places, and provide more opportunities to support education for our visitors, members and students.”

The North Carolina Arboretum is located off the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 393. From I-26, take Exit 33 and follow Blue Ridge Parkway signs for two miles to the entrance ramp. Please visit www.ncarboretum.org for parking fees and hours of operation.

To help support these new upgrades and create opportunities for future enhancements and jobs, the Arboretum board of directors will increase the basic per vehicle parking fee by \$2. Starting March 2, 2020, parking rates for personal vehicles will be raised to \$16. Members of The North Carolina Arboretum Society will continue to receive free parking year-round. Rates for passenger vans, motorhomes and commercial buses will remain the same, and the Arboretum will continue to offer its half-price parking special the first Tuesday of every month for personal vehicles. Access into the property for pedestrians and bicyclists will remain free, and Buncombe County and Henderson County library cardholders will continue to be able to check out a ZOOM pass for a free parking voucher.

“As we enter this new decade, we are excited about the future and providing more ways for our visitors and members to experience this wonderful place and the many superb programs it offers to both residents and visitors,” said Briggs.

For more information on the Arboretum, please visit www.ncarboretum.org.

About The North Carolina Arboretum

Each year more than 500,000 visitors experience the Arboretum’s gardens, trails, exhibits and plant shows, educational programs and lectures. The Arboretum’s ability to meet its mission and enrich the visitor experience is made possible by a community of supporting resources – from members, volunteers and staff to state and local funds, special events, donations, tribute gifts, grants and community partners.

The central mission of The North Carolina Arboretum, an affiliate institution of the 17-campus University of North Carolina System, is to cultivate connections among people, plants and places. A standard \$16 parking fee is required for non-members. Special events and after-hours activities may require additional fees. For more information, please call (828) 665-2492 or visit www.ncarboretum.org.

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