

Grand Rapids Pre-Conference Tour

by Matt Palmieri

The IPPS Eastern Region kicked off the Grand Rapids festivities with a full day Pre-Conference tour to a number of wonderful nurseries and gardens in the area. Attendees showed up bright and early for bus tours to Rosebay Nursery, Midwest Groundcovers, Blue Horizon Nursery and the Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park.

Starting off the day at Rosebay Nursery, attendees learned the true meaning of "tours will proceed, rain or shine" but quickly showed that plant enthusiasts aren't scared of a little cold or water. Rosebay is located on 20 acres of land that had formerly been a Christmas tree farm which gives them a unique environment for growing Rhododendron. With sandy soil and rows of mature pines in addition to their open areas, they are able to grow Rhodies in many different environments which allows them to find the ideal conditions for each and every one of their 80+ varieties. The group toured through the facility and got a chance to look at every step of the process from new cuttings in cold frames all the way to the most mature plants.



Linda Charvat, owner, Rosebay Nursery



Rhododendron production at Rosebay

With a break in the rain, the group was off to their next stop, Midwest Groundcovers. Here attendees got the chance to split up and cycle through a series of tours and demonstrations across the 300-acre nursery. On the shipping dock the group heard a presentation on implementation of Lean Flow practices in Midwest's order picking and shipping operation and how those lean changes have given them big results. In the greenhouses a small demonstration of seed and rooted cutting propagation allowed attendees to experience their practices first hand. Finally, on a wagon tour of the fields the group viewed the acres and acres of perennial and groundcover material being grown. Nobody had ever seen so much Vinca in one place before in their lives!



Matt Fredrickson welcomes the group to Midwest Groundcovers.



Ellie Gorski explains seeding machine.

The third stop of the day was the 56-acre Blue Horizon Nursery where the group had free roam of the grounds to experience the operation for themselves. Blue Horizon features a large display garden featuring rare and unique conifers as well as beautiful blown glass and sculpture features. In the prop range Blue Horizon's rooted cutting and heated grafting practices were on display and explained to the attendees. The plant material and operations weren't the only thing that was a hit at Blue Horizon; the facilities were so nice that even the restroom became a point of interest for attendees to marvel over! After seeing all there was to see at Blue Horizon the group grabbed lunch and headed on their way to the final stop of the day.



Co-founder Bill Snyder highlights the extensive display gardens at Blue Horizon Nursery.



The rain had slowed but the tent for lunch was greatly appreciated.

The Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park is comprised of 158 acres of gardens, meadows, woodlands and wetlands as well as indoor conservatories and sculptures galore. The group was turned loose with two hours to take in as much of the gardens as they could before packing it in for the day. The indoor conservatories featured desert, tropical and carnivorous plants as well as a seasonal display house which had lovely fall inspired plantings on display. Outdoors the eight-acre Japanese Gardens were a sight to behold. Consisting of many plants native to Japan as well as local species the garden was developed in a Japanese style with emphasis on reverence for nature. The sculpture gardens displayed hundreds of works by artists from all around the world, each with a unique story to tell. Finally, the Michigan's Farm Garden displayed heirloom vegetable gardens and structures reminiscent of 1930's era farming.



Shelby French, Ben Kobes and University of KY student Robert Brockman



Meijer Gardens Conservatory



Plant geek getting artsy!

At the end of the day, the group returned on the buses tired and a bit wind-blown but full of new knowledge and ideas and ready for three more days of learning and sharing with their fellow growers and industry professionals. Thanks to our tour hosts for their generous hospitality!