

For Immediate Release
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Grand Opening of Benenson Ornamental Conifers Set for Weekend of October 30, 2004

Largest Landscape Restoration Ever

The New York Botanical Garden's Benenson Ornamental Conifers, including many of the most interesting and exotic conifers in the country, will open on Saturday, October 30. The 400 plus-specimen collection located on 15 picturesque acres in the southernmost section of the Garden comprises the most extensive landscape restoration project the Garden has ever undertaken and one that is unprecedented among the nation's botanical gardens.

The restoration combined extensive planting of new trees, remedial care over five years to improve the health of existing specimens, and interpretative signage and enhancements to enrich the visitor's experience. According to Dr. Kim Tripp, Senior Vice President for Horticulture and Living Collections, "The Benenson Ornamental Conifers are unique; they include rare mature trees and cultivars of conifers from Europe that are no longer available in the trade. We are exhibiting scores of dwarf and specialty conifers, excellent garden plants that provide year-round beauty and color and are resilient in today's small urban gardens and spaces. They have been used by people around the world to grace gardens with striking texture, winter interest, evergreen character, and exquisite form."

The restored Benenson Ornamental Conifers will offer a brand-new scenic and educational walk for visitors, with rustic viewing pavilions overlooking the historic landscape and a rich panorama of conifers in diverse shapes and sizes. Starting October 30, narrated tram tours of the Garden will include the Benenson Ornamental Conifers. For a more detailed walking tour, visitors can participate in docent-led tours of the collection; see the Garden's Web site, www.nybg.org, for current schedules. Audiotours, available at the Leon Levy Visitor Center and at the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, will include the Benenson Ornamental Conifers on the 'Outdoor' tour.

New Trees, Irrigation System, Stone Pavilions

In 1999, with the leadership of board member James Benenson, Jr., the Garden began a complete restoration of the collection, then known as the Ornamental Conifer Collection. Under the direction of Kurt Morrell, the Garden's Director of Arboretum, Grounds, and Gardens, arborists and gardeners have spent five years clearing rock outcrops, restoring turf, and pruning and planting hundreds of conifers.

For the past three years, the Garden's Associate Vice President for Horticulture and Living Collections, Todd Forrest, has scoured nurseries, research fields, and plant collections from Connecticut to Oregon, searching for rare and beautiful specimens for the collection. Forrest's goal is to display as wide a range of cultivated conifers as possible: everything from unusual varieties like weeping giant sequoia to classics such as silver curls fir and 'Blue Star' juniper. More than 200 new conifers have been added, including as-yet-unnamed dwarf white pines from the research nursery of legendary plantsman Sidney Waxman, professor emeritus at the University of Connecticut. Many of the additions are displayed in two new beds designed with massive boulders especially positioned for the display of dwarf conifers.

Another major undertaking involved bolstering the health of existing trees through systematic mulching, fertilizing, and remedial pruning to improve growing conditions and reinvigorate older plants. Dense plantings were also added to screen and absorb outside noise.

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A new pair of pavilions creates an entrance gateway. A stone and wood pavilion, perched atop an impressive rock outcrop, provides a dramatic new view over mature and newly planted conifers. Explanatory signs describing the history of the collection and its exciting additions have been added, and new tram and pedestrian paths installed to improve access.

The natural beauty of the landscape is enhanced by new bluestone paving inside the gateway plaza and pavilions. Illumination of the entrance and plaza enables this area to be used for special events at night. Finally, to facilitate the future care of the collection, a new irrigation system was introduced, drainage systems upgraded, and additional power sources installed.

Trees Both Ancient and Modern

Conifers are an ancient group of plants that evolved over the last 300 million years into more than 600 different species. Many are treasured as ornamentals around the world. In 35 years of world travel, a famous collector, Colonel Robert H. Montgomery, amassed a spectacular collection of indigenous and exotic conifers for his estate in Cos Cob, Connecticut. He began donating specimens to The New York Botanical Garden in the 1930s and '40s, including many rare varieties that are irreplaceable today. These specimens form the core of the Benenson collection.

The Benenson Ornamental Conifers today consist of more than 400 conifers, including more than 100 donated by Montgomery. They complement the pine, fir, and spruce collections in the Garden's Ross Conifer Arboretum near the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory. Benenson Ornamental Conifer specimens range in size from one to 85 feet tall. Highlights include the original 'R. H. Montgomery' spruce that is now nearly 100 years old; a group of prehistoric dawn-redwoods from China, a species thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in a remote Chinese valley in the 1940s; and a rare reproducing pair of Japanese torreya. The opening ceremony launching the restoration of the collection in 2001 was marked by the planting of a blue conifer, a blue Arizona cypress (*Cupressus arizonica* 'Blue Ice').

Historic Design by Renowned Landscape Architect

In the late 1940s, renowned landscape architect Marian Cruger Coffin (1876–1957), who designed the Winterthur Museum grounds in Delaware, was retained to arrange the conifers artfully in the Garden. Coffin was one of the first and most accomplished female landscape architects in the United States, designing landscapes and gardens along the East coast, including Winterthur's formal gardens and the University of Delaware's mall. Coffin was born in Scarborough, New York, and educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Coffin's design for The New York Botanical Garden was one of several by pioneering female landscape designers in the first half of the twentieth century, when men dominated the profession. In 1916, Beatrix Jones Farrand designed the rose garden; her design was realized in 1988 and named in honor of Peggy Rockefeller. In the 1930s, landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman designed the Ladies' Border along the southern walk by the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory.

Revitalization of the Southeast Quadrant of the Garden

The opening of the 15-acre landscape of Benenson Ornamental Conifers is a significant step in the revitalization of the historic landscapes in the entire 45-acre southeast section of The New York Botanical Garden. The entrance to the Benenson Ornamental Conifers, lies between the Peggy Rockefeller Rose Garden and the landmark Snuff Mill on the Bronx River. It is also a short distance from the Ruth Rea Howell Family Garden.

More improvements are underway. Just to the east of the Benenson Ornamental Conifers, construction is well underway on the Nolen Greenhouses for Living Collections. The Nolen Greenhouses, to open in the spring of 2005, will provide a network of eight growing zones in two modern and efficient glass buildings on a four-acre site. Approximately an acre under glass, they will be the largest propagation greenhouses at any botanical garden in the United States. They will include a horticultural learning center for the public. In addition, the exterior of the historic 1840 Snuff Mill is being restored over the next two years. Windows, roof, and stonework are being repaired, repointed, or replaced. Dual-fuel burners and new electrical systems are also being installed.

The southeast quadrant of the Garden also contains additional horticultural features. The Dolores DeFina Hope Tree Peony Collection was recently installed on the hill overlooking the Rockefeller Rose Garden. On the other side of the rose garden are the lilac collection and the flowering cherry tree collection. The Garden's 60 different species and cultivated varieties of maples are in a collection just south of the rose garden. The largest American elm specimen in the Garden, a tall and graceful tree, is sited among the Benenson Ornamental Conifers, as are several venerable oak trees. Two massive white oaks are more than 200 hundred years old.

About the Design and Construction

Project management has been overseen by the Garden's Capital Projects team, under the direction of Michael Adlerstein, Vice President for Capital Projects; Bernice Chu, Director of Design; and Travis Peace, Project Manager. Patrick Chassé of Landscape Design Associates, Bar Harbor, Maine, researched the historic design and architectural elements. The landscape architects were Shavaun Towers and Joe Payne of Towers/Golde, New Haven, Connecticut. Soils and road testing was by Alan Poeppel of Langan Engineering, New York City. The civil engineer was Frank Vultaggio of Wohl & O'Mara, Staten Island, New York. The general contractor was Metrotech Contracting Corp. of Jamaica, New York; the landscape contractor was Kelco Landscaping of East Northport, New York. Yonkers Contracting Company, Inc., provided boulders used in the creation of the new dwarf conifer beds.

About Mr. and Mrs. James Benenson, Jr.

James Benenson, Jr., and his wife, Sharen, have a long history with The New York Botanical Garden, having been members since 1968. Mr. Benenson is a member of the Garden's Board and Chairman of the Horticulture Committee and the Campaign for Horticulture. Mrs. Benenson is a member of the Horticulture Committee and the Women's Council, and a former member of the Patrons Council.

Mr. Benenson, an investor and acquisition specialist, is head of James Benenson & Co., Inc.; Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Vesper Corporation; and Chairman of the Board and President of Arrowhead Holding Corporation.

*The restoration of the Benenson Ornamental Conifers was made possible
by Mr. and Mrs. James Benenson, Jr.*

The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road in the Bronx. The Garden is open year-round, Tuesday through Sunday and on Monday holidays, from 10 a.m.–6 p.m. April through October, and 10 a.m.–5 p.m. November through March. The best way to enjoy the Garden is with the *Garden Passport* that includes grounds admission, the Conservatory, Rock Garden, Native Plant Garden, Tram Tour, and Everett Children's Adventure Garden, and costs \$13 for adults, \$11 for students and seniors, \$5 for children 2–12. Grounds admission is free all day Wednesdays and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. For information call 718. 817. 8700 or visit our Web site at www.nybg.org.

Contact: George Shakespear or Maria Izquierdo 718.817.8616

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