November 29, 2012

Dear Friends,

Recent events—from our elections to the vast mobilization of people and resources to aid those affected by the devastation of Hurricane Sandy—find me thinking a great deal about the purpose and power of communities. The capacity of one person, one neighborhood, one state, or even one nation to make a real impact in the world grows in strength and promise through a shared vision and cooperation. Simply put, teamwork can move mountains.

I believe that the community spirit so central to our values has enabled the Arnold Arboretum to accomplish great things in our 140-year history, and gives us the potential to achieve so much more in ways that illuminate and transform humankind’s relationship with plants, science, and the world around us. As an active participant in the Arboretum’s community, you play an essential role in helping us achieve our goals. Today, I’m writing to ask that you support our work in horticulture, science, and education with a year-end gift to the Annual Fund.

Now, perhaps more than ever, we need your help. As you may know, the Arnold Arboretum receives the entirety of its annual budget from returns on endowments, grants, gifts, and memberships. To give you some idea of the challenges we face in the current economy, our annual income on these sources of revenue has fallen by roughly 20% over the past five years. Nevertheless, our landscape and living collection of plants from around the world have never looked more magnificent, nor have they been better managed and curated for their use as subjects of study. We also continue to be ambitious about our role in the City of Boston, our leadership in conservation efforts, and our determination to work toward a future for our children and grandchildren that is in harmony with Earth. In short, your contribution to our Annual Fund, like your vote in an election, can make a real difference!

As a vital community resource, the Arboretum’s value and meaning increases with each point of contact that sparks curiosity and satisfies our mutual need to grow. This is why we continue to seek new ways to increase the number and variety of our public interactions, from free talks like our upcoming Director’s Lecture Series and the frequent and intimate landscape gatherings we affectionately call Tree Mobs, to our recent launch of interactive mobile applications that place our plants and their mapped locations in the palm of your hand. These new offerings have galvanized our connection with the community, and amplified the number of scientists, horticulturists, and environmental experts who generously share their knowledge about our collections with the public.
Each year we invite hundreds of schoolchildren from around Boston to our landscape for programs that teach them about living things and the importance of the environment and conservation. This commitment begins with programs for urban pre-schoolers in Head Start that introduce them to a safe and fascinating outdoor environment, and continues through primary school field experiences that reveal how plants grow, replicate themselves, and provide fruits, building materials, and critical ecological services. In the past decade, the Arboretum has strengthened its longtime partnership with Boston Public Schools to provide life science instruction that builds literacy skills in the classroom as well as in our landscape. Over time the cumulative benefits of these programs instill in young people a profound respect for our collections as well as the biodiversity it represents.

Every community improves and grows through the nurturing help of individuals who recognize its importance and understand its value. Since the earliest days of the Arnold Arboretum, we have relied solely on the generous support of people like you to sustain our one-of-a-kind collections and the many ways they are used to educate, innovate, and inspire. At the close of another year in our enduring history as a free and open landscape for learning, I hope you will continue to play an active role in our work through your gift to the Annual Fund. In return, I offer my promise that the Arnold Arboretum will remain dedicated to a sustained, meaningful, and mutually beneficial engagement with the vibrant communities we serve. Thank you for your consideration.

With fond regards,

[Signature]

William (Ned) Friedman
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Arnold Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology, Harvard University