Homer Garden Club General Meeting

 March 17, 2019

 Minutes

In the absence of President Kathy Dube`, the meeting was called to order by co-V. P., Jan Peyton, at 2:10PM.

 Jan called for any announcements. Peggy Craig reported that the company usually offering bagged fish meal will not be doing so this year. If she hears that they’ve changed their minds an announcement will be made. Kyra Wagner with Homer Soil and Water announced that schools are looking for volunteers to sign up to help classroom teachers with indoor growing devices. Those interested should talk to Kyra. In answer to a question as to when birch trees should be tapped for syrup, the response was that it would depend on the weather but is usually in April.

The next general club meeting will be held on April 21, which is Easter. The speaker will be Paul Marmora who will talk about and demonstrate the art of bonsai. Co-V.P. Renee Patten said that he will demonstrate cutting, watering and maintaining a bonsai. The next board meeting will be on April 17 at the library.

Secretary Roni Overway had no announcements but publicly thanked those who took her place during her absence. Those people included Francie Roberts, Gloria Mumm and Barb Kennedy.

Louise Ashmun, treasurer, reported that there is currently $18,146.00 in the club’s accounts. She said that the club’s garden guide, *Kachemak Cultivating, from Seaside to Summit*, would be available at the back of the room following the meeting. Gardening aprons will be available as well. Francie provided additional information about the book. It is in softbound form with cover artwork by club member Jan Peyton and dividers by the late Toby Tyler. The book is an expanded version with new chapters addressing high tunnels and preserving the harvest. The price is $25.00.

Brenda Adams reported on our 13th annual Gardeners’ Weekend that will be held July 27th and 28th. There have been 5 gardens chosen for the tours, but the committee is still seeking one backup. She reported that volunteer signup sheets would be passed around during the meeting. The winery event will not be held this year because we have lost three of the people who were instrumental in putting on the event. Finding enough volunteers to staff the ever-growing celebration has been difficult. She also talked about this year’s very special guest speaker, Fergus Garrett, who is the head gardener of Great Dixter, a world-renowned British garden located in Sussex, England. She emphasized that in the U. K. the title “head gardener” has a great deal of meaning. Garrett is a multiple award winner and CEO of the Great Dixter Trust.

Barb Kennedy thanked those who brought refreshments to the meeting but also mentioned that the club is still in need of a social secretary, the person tasked with organizing refreshments for the general meetings but is also the chair of the annual Harvest dinner in September. Barb also said that the club’s annual plant sale will be held this year on Memorial Day. The Chamber of Commerce will allow it to be held on their property again this year. More details will be forthcoming.

Brenda said that a signup sheet would also be available for those who will help with the Baycrest garden. Two people are needed each week and can choose any day of the week to work. Those volunteers will perform general upkeep including weeding, deadheading, etc. She will schedule and announce the garden’s spring cleanup when a date has been determined. Usually about 20 volunteers do come to help out, which makes short work of a big project. Brenda is also looking for two more employees for her garden design business.

Data base manager, Barbara Kennedy, reported that membership is down. Annual dues are just $10.00 and members receive a club newsletter each month during the months they meet.

Jan then introduced the day’s speakers, Don McNamara and Donna Rae Faulkner the developers and owners of Oceanside Farms. The farm began as a small operation with two small high tunnels doing SPIN farming (small plot intensive). In order to grow their operation, they sold that property and purchased about 5 acres at 58509 East End Road where they currently farm in 8 high tunnels with plans to add two more. They also sell produce in a roadside stand as well as certified seed potatoes and eggs, all sold on the honor system at the farm.

An aerial photo of the farm allowed Donna Rae to point out what crops they had growing in what locations as well as where their chickens and ducks dwell, where seeds are started, where Don now produces charred wood for composting. They have also built a root cellar which maintained a temperature of 38 degrees. Asked what they plant in the potato acreage in between seasons Don said that they use winter rye and clover which add nutrients to the soil and aids in water retention. They also collect rain water from the roofs of the tunnels at a rate of 1” of rain from 1000 sq. ft. of roof =600 gallons of water.

Oceanside Farm is now also growing apple trees with 100 on the inside of a row a spruce in the hope that moose will be deterred by the spruce. They have also installed an 8’ solar powered wire mesh fence that produces 10 kilowatt hours or power to further protect the crop from animals. Flame weeding also helps with maintenance time.

Donna said, in relation to the growth of high tunnel farming, that the Kenai Peninsula has the most in the country, at about 300. The Matanuska Valley has approximately 169 and state of Ohio about 100. Grants provide ½ of the cost of the tunnels. The National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) website has information about eligibility. Although Oceanside is not 100% organic, it does follow organic practices and includes no synthetics and no GMOs. What they do is called regenerative farming which can be described loosely as a system of farming that aims to regenerate topsoil, increase biodiversity, improve water cycles, etc. A further description can be found on line. Their composting includes a fish slurry produced with fish waste they are able to obtain, generally in the month of February, from seafood processors. Don cautioned that in using this ingredient the farmer needs to check for fish hooks! In 2020 they hope to be offering Green Mountain potatoes, a new variety. They are also experimenting with growing grapes for use in Pinot Noir wine.

Some of the more sophisticated tools they use include a greens harvester, their new rhubarb press and an accordion style paper product that expands for the planting of seeds. After it is used for starting seeds it allows for the transplanting of seedlings in the tunnels with another farming implement called a paperpot transplanter. See paperpot.com.

Oceanside Farms is also spending time helping Kodiak villagers to get started growing some of their own produce and other edibles.

Explaining the process of rhubarb juice production, they said that the rhubarb should be cut into short lengths to fit in the press and then frozen. Later they can be brought out and pressed. The juice is found to be high in Vitamin K and fiber. Other nutrients can be found on line.

Donna Rae announced that the Alaska Food Hub will be working this year out of the public health offices across from 2 Sisters and that Homer growers this year will have some produce available through Sav-U-More.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Roni Overway

Recording Secretary