

Camellia Cove at the Chesapeake Arboretum

A Partnership Honoring the Legacy of Our Friend Fritz



In the spring of 2018, the Virginia Camellia Society joined forces with the Chesapeake Arboretum in a labor of love and remembrance to revitalize a section of the arboretum known as Camellia Cove which had become overgrown and in need of some serious TLC. VCS members voted to adopt Camellia Cove to honor and remember our friend Fritz, who was instrumental in establishing this section of the arboretum.

Dr. Fritz Morsink, or Fritz as he was known to most, was born in Padang, Indonesia, the son of the Dutch Ambassador. He and his family were imprisoned in Japanese concentration camps in 1939 in Indonesia when he was 8 years old. In 1945 he was reunited with his family and moved back to Holland.

He graduated from the University of Wageningen with a Plant Pathology degree. He continued his studies at Cornell University where he earned his Masters in Science and a minor in Biochemistry. He received his Ph.D. in Botany from the University of New Hampshire. Fritz was an esteemed professor for more than 29 years at Towson University in the Biology department.

He retired to Chesapeake, dedicating his life to raising camellias and to the betterment of those in need around him. He had a knack for discovering the beauty in life where it otherwise might go unnoticed. Fritz was a member of the Virginia Camellia Society, American Camellia Society, and the International Camellia Society. He was responsible for starting the camellia collection at the Chesapeake Arboretum with the creation of Camellia Cove and for enhancing the collection at the Norfolk Botanical Garden. Fritz willed both organizations funds as a living memorial.

A core group of VCS members and Chesapeake master gardeners, led by Dale Shelley, began clearing invasive plants and cutting through years of undergrowth in order to uncover the remaining camellias. Of the approximately 300 original cultivars, less than 200 remained with many of those being unidentified and in dire need of nurturing. Plants were pruned and fertilized. Cultivars were identified and tagged. Trails and walkways were reestablished and mulched. Decorative borders were installed. Several new camellia varieties were added through generous donations from individual members, VCS, and Norfolk Botanical Gardens.

In two short but busy years, a beautiful and vigorous Camellia Cove has emerged from an overgrown, neglected wilderness. The Virginia Camellia Society extends its sincere appreciation to Dale Shelley for his leadership and commitment in restoring Camellia Cove and to Bob Fountain, Coordinator of Volunteers & Education at the Chesapeake Arboretum, for providing encouragement and resources required to accomplish the task. Virginia Camellia Society looks forward to our continued partnership as we further enhance Camellia Cove in the years to come.

Chesapeake Arboretum

624 Oak Grove Road • Chesapeake VA 23322

Located in the heart of Chesapeake and named one of Virginia's Treasures by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Chesapeake Arboretum is a 48-acre natural classroom dedicated to promoting horticultural and environmental awareness. The Arboretum headquarters is an eighteenth-century farmhouse with theme gardens that include a fragrance and antique rose garden.

One of Virginia's finest trail systems meanders through the mature hardwood forest with many varieties of native plants and trees. The Chesapeake Arboretum is part of the American Camellia Trail as well as The Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail.

The Arboretum serves as a training ground for the local Urban Forestry groups. It is a shining example of how green infrastructure can enhance the quality of life by offsetting the ecological effects of land development. The Arboretum provides important social, aesthetic, functional, and economic and recreational benefits to all citizens.