

2025 SUMMER NEWSLETTER

RITA THOMAS,
DESIGNER/EDITOR

All photos by Rita Thomas
except where noted.

Wisconsin Peony Society

www.wipeonysociety.org

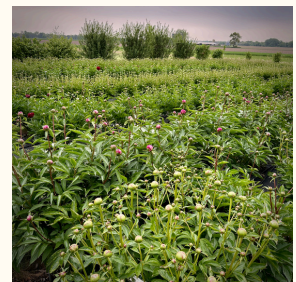


PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MICHELLE OVANS

The American Peony Society held its convention in Beaver Dam, Wi. from June 11 – 15, 2025. This convention met and exceeded both the APS Mission & Wisconsin Peony Society's Mission: "First and foremost, the American Peony Society strives to bring people and the peony together." With 1,500 bottles filled with one to three magnificent peony blooms, the Beaver Dam High School was filled with over three-thousand visitors, over two days, to view the "Artistry in Bloom" exhibition along with attending educational seminars ranging from "Peonies 101" to the latest research topics. This show having the most visitors in the last decade is a testament of the hard work, planning and collaboration with the Beaver Dam Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism, Travel Wisconsin and Judges from the National Federated Gardeners Guild and the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Peony Society.

The Wisconsin Peony Society hosted this magnificent event.



The WPS contributed over \$6,000 for advertising the convention with banners, rack cards, tent & chairs, hosting the Hospitality Room and providing a wonderful catered luncheon for both APS & WPS members. Our members served as Bus Captains, Speakers, maintained/stocked food for the Hospitality Room and assisted with the set-up and the running of the flower show.

The Beaver Dam Chamber of Commerce devoted countless hours to the writing and submission of the Meeting Mean Business (MMB) Grant application. This grant paid \$6,202.62 towards the facility and transportation costs. They included the APS Convention in all advertisements for the Wisconsin Art & Peony Festival, along with providing maps and lists of activities in the Welcome packets. This was a wonderful example of collaboration between the local chamber and the APS, bringing together both the Wisconsin Art & Peony Festival, Wisconsin Heritage Peony Garden and the "Artistry in Bloom" flower show.

The Hoard Museum was presented with the APS Reference Garden plaque on Saturday, May 31, 2025. The plaque was presented by Cory Tishman, APS Vice-President and Michelle Ovans, WPS President. The Wisconsin Heritage Peony Garden received the APS Reference Garden plaque and a presentation by the Beaver Dam Rotarians and Beaver Dam City Officials is planned for early spring 2026.

It took many volunteers to accomplish all these wonderful events. Without them, the Wisconsin Peony Society could no longer be a source of education to the public. The WPS Board of Directors have consistently supported every decision to promote and further the love of peonies and without their guidance and knowledge, none of this would have been possible.

Thank you,
Michelle Ovans, President WPS



PHOTO BY RITA THOMASS

**WELCOMING BOUQUET BY
MICHELLE**

CELEBRATING A SUCCESSFUL CONVENTION

The Wisconsin Peony Society hosted an extremely successful American Peony Society Convention in Beaver Dam. It was the result of years of dedicated effort and strategic planning by WPS President Michelle Ovans, along with WPS member and former APS President Nate Bremer. They poured their hearts into fundraising, curating the itinerary, and arranging essential logistics such as: housing, venue, buses, banquet, picnic, and even a trolley to transport attendees from the City Center to the High School.

They collaborated closely with the City, which was simultaneously hosting the annual Wisconsin Arts & Peony Festival and the Taste of Wisconsin. With countless elements needing to align, they managed to pull it off flawlessly. Congratulations and a heartfelt thanks to all involved!



TROLLEY SERVICE
SPONSORED BY
HORICON BANK

WPS CONVENTION VOLUNTEERS

WPS members contributed in various ways, including serving as bus captains, managing the Hospitality Rooms, selling seeds, providing assistance with the Flower Show and much more.

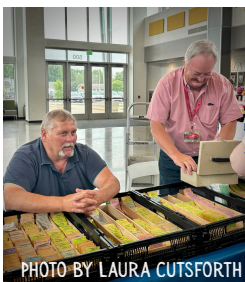


PHOTO BY LAURA CUTSFORTH

Michelle Ovans, Nate & Kim Bremer, Scott Parker, Laura Cutsforth, Lloyd and Judy Ravet, Carrie Czerwonka, Rita Thomas, Marilyn Thomas, Sharon Schmitz, Todd Hauser, Tracey Nelson, Sam & Helen Finazzo, Dale Hughes, Doug Kindschuh, Pat Trapp, Jerri O'Connor, Carol Adelman, Mark Miles, Lois Girton, and Dave & Linette Sorrentino.



PHOTO BY LAURA CUTSFORTH

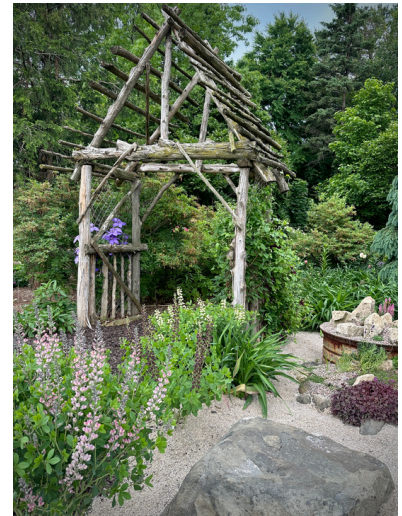
This couldn't have
happened without
YOU!



PHOTO BY MICHELLE OVANS

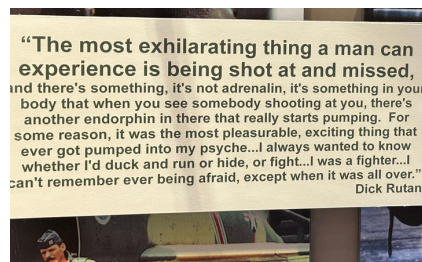
APS CONVENTION ACTIVITIES

LARRY CONRAD'S GARDENS AT OAK LAWN CHEESE FACTORY



EAA AVIATION MUSEUM, OSHKOSH

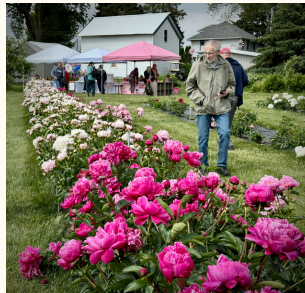
LUNCH AT OSHKOSH LAKESHORE PARK



SISSON'S PEONY GARDENS, ROSENDALE, WI.



OVANS' PEONY FARM, BEAVER DAM. GARDENS AND CATERED LUNCH



WISCONSIN PEONY SOCIETY PICNIC AT OVANS PEONY FARM

BY CARRIE CZERWONKA

The Annual WPS Picnic, in conjunction with the APS Convention, was a huge success! Imagine enjoying fancy salads and rolls paired with delicious butters while surrounded by blooming peonies—what more could we ask for?

There was a garden art setup by Greg's Antiques that I had a hard time leaving. I couldn't choose between an airplane (well, two airplanes) and a twirling tri-level ginkgo spinner. I went with an airplane! And while waiting for the bus, we got to compare our treasures. A couple from Oregon bought the ginkgo spinner! Just about everybody got something on a pole, which made for an interesting setup on the bus ride home.

There were also cookies perfect for your next special occasion, and a preservation artist who can keep your favorite flower forever. The highlight, however, was strolling among the peonies—the scent was absolutely delightful, and I truly wished I could stay longer at the farm.

One of my favorite lunchtime discussions revolved around the best-scented peonies. There was plenty of back and forth, but here were some noted: 'Nancy Nora,' 'Myrtle Gentry,' 'Pastelegance,' 'Canary Brilliants' (later retracted, because nobody agreed on that one, and she isn't positive it is labelled correctly. But the one in her yard, it smells up the whole house! And it is amazing!). I myself have 16 on order, and most of them have been noted to have a scent. I can't wait to figure out my favorite scented peony!

Thank you, Michelle, for letting us visit your beautiful home. We particularly enjoyed the photo shoot setup! Your cut flowers are amazing, and this was a perfect location and day to visit.

"ARTISTRY IN BLOOM"

RECORD NUMBERS ATTEND FLOWER SHOW



BANQUET AT BEAVER DAM COUNTRY CLUB

The special evening began with a social hour, providing an opportunity for old friends to reminisce while new friendships blossomed.

The delectable banquet menu featured: Beef Tenderloin, Chicken Cordon Bleu, Broccolini, Mashed Potatoes, Salad, Warm Rolls, and Cheesecake for Dessert

The Annual General Membership Meeting was presided over by Lois Girton, the APS President. Special guests included City of Beaver Dam Mayor Bobbi Marck, and former Mayor Becky Glewen.

Inviting these distinguished guests was fitting, as they played a pivotal role in the Convention.

Only one personal award was presented by Steve Smith this year. Neither the A.P. Saunders Memorial Medal nor the Bertrand H. Farr awards were given.



PHOTO CURTESY OF K BREMER

JOE & HAZEL COOK
WITH BILL SEIDL

THE AMERICAN PEONY SOCIETY MEDAL GOES TO HAZEL AND JOE COOK. CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU!

CORY TISCHMAN & JEFF KABOT CELEBRATE SUCCESS WITH AT LEAST SEVEN OF THEIR ENTRIES MAKING IT TO THE 2025 COURT OF HONOR. WELL DONE!



THE AUCTION, FEATURING 75 ITEMS, REMAINS THE EVENING'S HIGHLIGHT. NATE AND SCOTT TEAMED UP TO KEEP THE AUCTION LIVELY AND FAST-PACED. BLOOD MOON, ORIGINATOR NATE BREMER, FETCHED THE HIGHEST BID, SELLING FOR AN IMPRESSIVE \$310.

*POSSIBLE ERRORS IN THE AMOUNTS - IT WAS DARK AND NOISY

#	Title	Bidder	Amount	#	Title	Bidder	Amount
1	Antigone		70	35	Callisto		280
2	Monsieur Dupont		50	36	Pink Lemonade, Angel Cheeks		120
3	Marie Crousse		45	37	Ruby Riches		175
4	Maria Teresa		75	38	Winged Victory #1		60
5	Rozella		70	39	Winged Victory #2		60
6	Nelda's Joy		150	40	Blood Moon		310
7	Sharon's Blush		120	41	Seidl's Super		140
8	Edna's Wish		180	42	Perfection		230
9	Great Lady		60	43	Smoky Mountain		170
10	Patricia Jean		135	44	KimSue		80
11	Diana Parks #1		60	45	First Arrival		100
12	Diana Parks #2		50	46	Embraceable Glory		160
13	Courage		80	47	Lois' Choice		75
14	Early Scout		50	48	Sword Dance		40
15	Tranquil Dove		240	49	3 P. daurica ssp. mikosewitschii		100
16	Manitowac Maiden		100	50	Love Affair		100
17	Kayleigh Ann #1		260	51	Goldilocks		80
18	Kayleigh Ann #2		260	52	Cherry Pie		170
19	Cloud Atlas		250	53	Gratis		100
20	Your Majesty		215	54	La Perle		70
21	Carl G. Klehm		95	55	Gordon E. Simonson		60
22	Rock's Variety/Joseph Rock		150	56	Grand Massive		110
23	Pink Parfait #1		60	57	Anne Oveson		60
24	Pink Parfait #2		60	58	Hecate		210
25	New Dimension		125	59	New Millennium		120
26	Bartzella		80	60	Sparkling Windflower		190
27	Madame Furtado		100	61	Dan W.		95
28	Frances Willard		40	62	Good Cheer		135
29	Big Boy		60	63	Fizzy		110
30	Chalice Pink		60	64	Rose Treadle		90
31	Spring Sun		280	65	Murad of Hershey Bar		80
32	Big Sombrero		230	66	Ambiance		90
33	William D. Hoard Jr.		115	67	Rose Heart		100

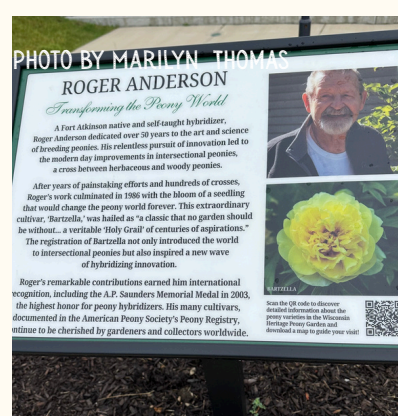


COPPER KING

GRAND CHAMPION -
COPPER KING
ORIGINATOR
NATE BREMER
CONGRATULATIONS!

WISCONSIN HERITAGE PEONY GARDEN - CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

This garden has genuinely become a "Celebration of Cooperation" among the Beaver Dam Community, WPS, Ovans Peony Farm, Beaver Dam Rotarians, and Wisconsin Hybridizers. One of the primary challenges is ensuring ongoing support and care for a city garden like the Heritage Garden. Mayor Bobbi Marck and former Mayor Becky Glewen played crucial roles in the garden's development, while members of the Beaver Dam Rotarians have taken on the responsibility of its upkeep and maintenance.



HOSPITALITY

PHOTO BY MARILYN THOMAS



Sisters Marilyn and Rita Thomas provided a variety of healthy snacks for energy and a little sugar to keep everyone sweet.

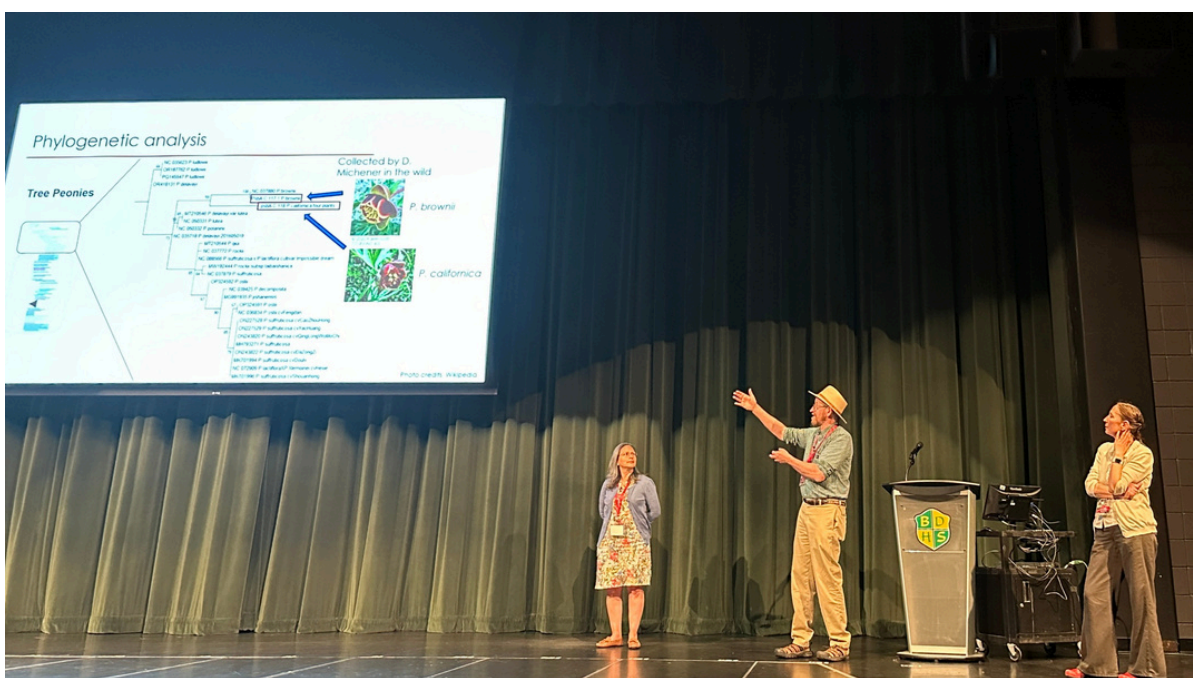
CONVENTION SEMINARS

Many captivating seminars were offered at the convention, beginning with flower judging on Thursday. The sessions continued on Saturday, starting with “Peonies 101,” followed by:

- “Dividing Peonies”
- “Peony Diseases and Management”
- “Unlocking the Possibilities: Success in Germinating and Growing Peonies from Seed”
- “The Peony Myth-Busters: Rethinking Garden Staples for Today's Gardener”
- “Making Your Garden More Pollinator Friendly”

Our guests from the University of Michigan, who are also members of APS, shared their latest research in a presentation titled “Peony Gardens and Research: Making Sense Behind the Beauty.” The presenters included:

- Dr. Lilianna Cortez-Oritz – Primatology & Lab Administrator
- Dr. Nastassia Vlasava – Doctor of Genomics & Lab Scientist
- Dr. David Michener – Curator at the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum.



BELARUS TO BEAVER DAM

On October 1, 2022, the WPS approved a grant of \$10,000 to the University of Michigan for research on peony genetics, phylogeography and various viruses that affect Peonies.

Three members of the team participated in the APS Convention, where they delivered an impressive presentation outlining the progress of their study. For details of their presentation, you can visit this link:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11209033/>



David Michener

Curator at the
University of
Michigan Matthaei
Botanical Gardens
and Nichols
Arboretum.

Liliana Cortés-Ortiz

Phylogenetic
methods and results

Nastassia B Vlasava

PhD in Plant
Genetics, Group
Leader at National
Academy of
Sciences of
Belarus; University
of Michigan
Viral issues and
significance.

Where We Stand Today

We are not the first to grapple with the issues of managing cultivated diversity – crop / food security systems exist but are usually funded by national governments.

“Show By Example” – Use the W.E. Upjohn Peony Garden to pilot in peony conservation networks:

- Specimen quality control
- 5-year, 10-year, and longer research agendas
- Shared, published results
- Coherent data management (\$\$)
- A culture of building talent, teams, and networks



Next steps

- To **continue monitoring for symptoms** of viral disease in the UM peony collection.
- **Identify the different viruses** in the UM collection.
- Study the genetic expression of **potential resistance genes** in the different cultivars.
 - Non-infected plants could be a source of resistance genes against specific viruses.
 - In the future explore the potential use of CRISPR technology for gene editing.
- Understand the **vectors** (insects, pollen, etc.) for different viruses



Acknowledgements

We can't do this by ourselves

University of Michigan - W.E. Upjohn Peony Garden Endowment

University of Michigan - Biodiversity Lab (BDL)

Central Botanical Gardens – Minsk – National Academy of Sciences of Belarus

Research Funds from the **American Peony Society, Minnesota Peony Society and Wisconsin Peony Society.**

Collaborators: Anton Reznicek, Andrea Thomer, Nathan Amann

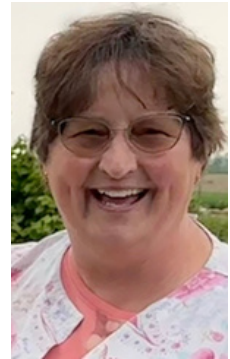


OUTGOING B.O.D. MEMBERS

HONORING OUR OUTGOING PRESIDENT

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to you, Michelle, for stepping up when we needed a President. Your leadership throughout the challenging times of the 2025 APS Convention has been truly invaluable. If not for you, we surely would not have taken on the enormous task of hosting the 2025 APS Convention.

Michelle was elected as vice-president during our meeting on March 4, 2023. When the elected president could not fulfill her responsibilities, Michelle graciously took on the role and has committed herself to our mission from that point until now, June 2025.



MICHELLE OVANS

Wishing you all the best in your future endeavors.

THANK YOU, LAURA



We sincerely appreciate your dedication, Laura Cutsforth, for serving as our treasurer over the past two years. This term was particularly demanding due to the Convention, so your 4-year experience as the inaugural WPS treasurer has been truly invaluable.

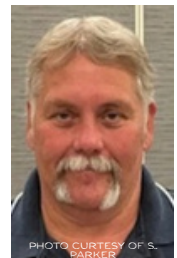
Thank you so much for stepping up when we needed you.

INCOMING B.O.D. MEMBERS

WELCOME SCOTT PARKER, PRESIDENT

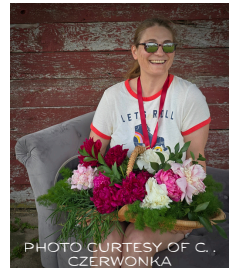
Scott Parker, a native of Tomah, is a self-taught hybridizer specializing in herbaceous peonies, although he has a keen interest in all types. In his hybridizing program, he focuses particularly on the Lactiflora Group.

Scott founded the Wisconsin Peony Society in 2009 and served as its president for many years. He has also held the position of president for the American Peony Society (APS), where he has worked tirelessly to educate the public about growing peonies from seed by overseeing the APS Seed Program. In recognition of his outstanding contributions to the peony community, he was awarded the prestigious 'Bertrand H. Farr Lifetime Achievement' award in 2023.



WELCOME CARRIE CZERWONKA, VICE-PRESIDENT

I hold a degree in Horticulture Science from UW Madison and have spent a decade working as a copyeditor for various journals, including *Crop Science*, *Agronomy Journal*, and the *Soil Science Society of America Journal*. Life took a turn when I had twins, leading me to substitute teach in New Glarus. Additionally, I coach teams in FIRST Lego League and VEX robotics, and I lead a Girl Scout troop. My passion for gardening is immense; I have a vast garden that keeps me busy.



WELCOME HELEN FINAZZO, TREASURER



I have been a part of the WPS since its inception, initially as a commercial grower alongside my husband, Sam, and now as a family member. We continue to cultivate around 300 peonies, but now solely for our personal enjoyment. I volunteered to serve as treasurer due to my experience from managing our business. I am excited to contribute to the future of WPS.

— Helen Finazzo

WELCOME TRACEY NELSON, DIRECTOR-AT-LARGE

I am an avid gardener with a special interest in plant breeding, including lilies, peonies, and daylilies, and I have dabbled in dahlia and zinnia breeding as well. I have been a registered nurse for thirty years.

I have been involved in WPS in the past as a secretary, and I am currently the Chair of the Guest Garden Program. I've been a member of WPS since at least 2010, and have been actively involved since I joined. I believe you get as much out of an organization as you put into it. I look forward to collaborating with the WPS Board to continue to lead WPS into the future in a positive and meaningful way.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Scott Parker

Vice-President: Carrie Czerwonka

Secretary: Damon Smith

Treasurer: Helen Finazzo

Membership: Sharon Schmitz

Newsletter Editor: Rita Thomas

Directors-At-Large: Jerri O'Connor and
Tracey Nelson

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Peony Auction, Saturday October 4, 2025
West Madison Agriculture Research
Station

10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

10:00 – 10:30 A.M. Social time

10:30 – 11:00 A.M. BOD business meeting

11:00 – 12:00 A.M. Registration and lunch

12:00 P.M. Auction

Open to the public – Bring your friends!



Garden and Green Living Expo. PBS
Wisconsin 2026
Feb 13-14-15, 2026

We will be looking for volunteers, so save
the date and join us behind the table.

March Meeting

Saturday March 28, 2026

West Madison Agriculture Research Station

12:00 – 1 P.M. Social and lunch

1:00 – end Speaker Brian Hudelson, aka Dr. Death.

Brian Hudelson is affectionately known as “Dr. Death” because of his love of plant diseases. Brian received his BS in Botany, Bacteriology and Molecular Biology, MS in Biometry and PhD in Plant Pathology from the UW-Madison, and in 1998, became the director of the Plant Disease Diagnostics Clinic. For more information click here: <https://pddc.wisc.edu/clinic-staff-2/>



2025 ANNUAL ROOT AUCTION

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2025



Get ready for our annual fall peony root auction! We increasingly depend on our dedicated members to provide the plants that keep our auction vibrant.

Members, please explore your gardens for plants that can be divided, relocated, or even removed entirely to welcome new additions. Whether you can spare a single division of a common plant or are donating 20 rare varieties, your contribution will support essential Society activities, including the Garden Expo booth, educational meetings and workshops, and initiatives like the Sisson Garden, the West Madison Agricultural Research Station, and the Peony DNA project.

In addition to the joy of supporting the Society and its programs, any member who donates four or more plants will receive "10 Peony Bucks" which can be used at the auction to purchase roots.

The auction will be open to the public, so bring your friends, family, and fellow peony lovers for a delightful afternoon.

Please contact Tracey Nelson (tcnelson19@gmail.com, tel. 608-205-9789), Scott Parker (oldtooltrader@hotmail.com, tel. 608-378-4778), or Damon Smith (damonsmith56@hotmail.com, tel. 608-335-0336) by ****September 15**** to let us know what you'll be contributing. This information helps us gather pictures, compile the auction list, and prepare the PowerPoint presentation. If you require assistance with digging your roots, please reach out to us as early as possible, and we will do our utmost to arrange help for you.

GUEST GARDEN PROGRAM

TRACEY NELSON

Guest Garden recipients were chosen this Spring for a number of peonies made available to garden hosts. Cultivars included this year were 'Fairy's Petticoat', 'Little Rhyme', 'Kathy's Touch', 'Nelda's Joy', 'Big Jhonny', 'Sky Dance', and 'Bridal Gown'. The chosen participants have been contacted and will receive their peonies this Fall at our WPS Root Auction. I appreciate those who have expressed interest. It is fun growing these peonies.

Each participant will grow their guest peony for three years, at which time they will divide the peony, keep one division for themselves, and remit the remaining 1-2 divisions to the Guest Garden Coordinator to place in the root auction and/or to a new Guest Gardener. Participation in The Guest Garden Program, on an occasional basis, is a benefit of actively participating in WPS Events. Being active in WPS helps the organization thrive, and spreads out the workload when volunteering in different areas where we have needs.

For more information on this program click here:
<https://wipeonysociety.org/guest-gardener-program/>



Kristin Joy 2027
Adoption



Lady Gay 2024
Adoption

TREASURER'S REPORT

HELEN FINAZZO

Checking Balance 4-30-25	2,056.24	
Transfer from Savings	3,000.00	
Total in Checking		5,056.24

Expenses

APS	WPS share of luncheon	2,992.50
Sharon Schmitz	Clicker	7.37
Michelle Ovans	Reimburse for luncheon	
	utensils and cups	183.48
UPS Store	Name badges	10.13
Rita Thomas	Hospitality room supplies	699.40
Total Expenses		3,892.88
Checking balance		1,163.36
Savings balance		7,546.63
Total Cash Assets 6-30-25		\$8,709.99

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

SHARON SCHMITZ

Sharon has reported that we currently have 114 members, with 13 new memberships since our March, 2025 meeting.

