

ISSUE #16 MAY 2020

## Paul Kulesa: Building a Strong Foundation

*By: Tamara Milostan*

Paul has been an integral part of the AABS and has played an important role in building the strong foundation that the club is now founded on. He joined the club in 1994 and his criteria for joining at that time was that the meetings were held on Wednesdays instead of on the weekend. Our club was very fortunate that it worked out this way and Paul says 'The club has been very good to me.



*Paul styling an Eastern White Cedar at a 2019 John Wall workshop.*

Paul has always been a gardener, growing vegetables and flowers. But he says his bonsai addiction began in the 90's when he was introduced to a few bonsai magazines by a friend from Bay City. From there Paul says he learned by doing. He felt that if he was going to be any good at bonsai he had to jump in with both feet. For him that meant collecting seedling trees and seeds from a place up north where he hunted. He also bought some nursery stock and then it was just a matter of growing them for about 6 years. In this way he learned the basics of how a tree grows and what it takes to keep it healthy, a good foundation. Then in the late 90's Paul began volunteering at Matthaei Gardens with Connie Bailey and Jack Wikle who worked with the bonsai collection. This is where he learned a lot about caring for bonsai, especially the bigger, more established trees. He has continued this volunteer work for 25 years and has helped school other newcomers in the art of bonsai.

Paul's work in the club began when he and another member started an outreach program to get new members interested in the club and to get the name of the AABS out so the community could get involved in bonsai. The next project that Paul took on was putting together a newsletter with the help of Deborah Eddy. She would take notes at the meetings and write up the newsletter and Paul would put it together and mail it out to members. This involved a lot of time and hands on since there was printing, labeling, and stamping every month.

Later Paul became the program director for the AABS, looking for speakers and ideas that would be of interest to club members. At that time Jay Sinclair was president and he felt that they worked well together to make the club a successful one.

Paul has since stepped away from AABS board and membership responsibilities. He says, "Ron Milostan has taken on a lot responsibility for bringing new blood into the club and as far as the administration goes, that works out well." But Paul is still very involved with two big yearly events for the club. Every year he seamlessly manages the Auction which all of the members enjoy and look forward to and he handles the set up and take down of our annual show.

Paul has a bit of advice for people just getting started. He feels that beginners should learn to grow trees in general before they try and grow bonsai. He

feels that starting with a young tree and watching it grow is the way to learn. If you kill a few young trees, it's not the end of the world. If you go and spend your hard earned money on a larger tree that doesn't survive, you're out that money. You've lost a valuable asset. Learn how to take care of trees before you step into the big leagues. A lot of trees don't survive from year to year because of the way they are over watered or problems with root pruning. So learn how to grow trees before you learn bonsai, bonsai comes later. In other words make sure you have a foundation on which to build.



*Paul explaining the proper way to do root pruning.*

Paul works on his own bonsai collection in a very organized and systematic way. He says he is inspired to continue in bonsai by the seasonal work that is involved. In February he gets his notes and photos in order and updates his records. He gets the supplies that will get him through the spring and early summer. He has learned what needs to be done earlier or can wait until later without sacrificing the safety of the trees. By the end of October he is looking forward to putting his trees to bed for the winter, but by 'February I'm already working on what's coming up in the new year'. He says, "For me it is a nine to ten month operation and I really enjoy it." In fact, at times Paul regrets not having started working on bonsai earlier in his life. Paul also has time and energy to devote to maintaining a beehive and he is well known among friends for his home baked bread.

As an aside, Paul still orders and picks up seedlings from Monroe County Conservation District.

*Previous issues of this publication are located in the [History section of the AABS website](#)*

### **NEXT WEEK: *Resurrection of a Crane-Tree Bonsai***

#### **HOW YOU CAN HELP WITH OUR 50TH CELEBRATION**

1. To help us in this celebration effort, all Ann Arbor Bonsai Society members present and past, and all others wishing to contribute are invited to submit personal statements (60 words or less) to be published in our Yearbook. Each text contributor is also strongly encouraged to submit a favorite photo (with caption) of a bonsai tree or a bonsai activity to accompany his or her personal statement. (We can scan old prints or digitize color slides for anyone needing this help with old pictures.) [Upload Form is here.](#)
2. Let's all Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the AABS in style with shirts that have our commemorative logo printed on the front. Shirts will be available for purchase for \$20 each at our monthly meetings, at the Annual Club Show August 29-30, and at The Flower Market in Dundee, Michigan.



Ann Arbor Bonsai Society  
[aabonsaisociety@gmail.com](mailto:aabonsaisociety@gmail.com)  
<http://www.annarborbonsaisociety.org>