



NATIONAL TROPICAL BOTANICAL GARDEN

Chartered by Congress to Create a National Resource in Conservation, Research, and Education

NTBG Director to Receive Garden Club of America Award Chipper Wichman named GCA's 2018 Medal of Honor Recipient

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kalāheo, Kauaʻi, Hawaiʻi USA (April 25, 2018) — The National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG) is pleased to announce that The Garden Club of America (GCA) has named Charles R. “Chipper” Wichman, President, Director, and Chief Executive Officer of the institution, as the recipient of its 2018 Medal of Honor. The medal, which is awarded for outstanding service to horticulture, will be presented following a black tie reception at the GCA’s Annual Meeting in San Francisco on April 29, 2018.

Wichman was selected as the GCA’s 2018 Medal of Honor recipient after being nominated for the award by the Garden Club of Honolulu whose president Jann Boxold described Wichman as a “global leader in conservation and horticulture who has dedicated his life to the discovery and conservation of tropical plants and the protection of their habitats.”

Born in Honolulu in 1957, Wichman is a graduate of Roosevelt High School. From an early age Wichman was enthusiastic about interacting with nature and, at the urging of his conservation-minded grandmother Juliet Rice Wichman, he applied to a horticultural internship at the Pacific Tropical Botanical Garden (today National Tropical Botanical Garden) on the island of Kauaʻi. After completing the internship in 1976, Wichman joined the Garden as staff, first as an apprentice stone mason, then as a head groundsman in the Lāwaʻi Valley.

Beginning in 1977, Wichman collaborated with botanist Steve Perlman to conduct extensive botanical surveys of the Limahuli Valley which was then owned by Wichman’s grandmother. During this period and through the 1980s and 90s, Wichman contributed to the discovery or rediscovery of over a dozen previously unknown species endemic to the Limahuli Valley, Kauaʻi’s Nā Pali Coast, and elsewhere. Discoveries include the striking orange *Hibiscus kokio* subsp. *saintjohnianus* as well as *Pritchardia limahuliensis*, *Lysimachia ovoidea*, *Schiedea kauaiensis*, *Cyanea kuhihewa*, and others.

As part of their fieldwork, Wichman and Perlman were the first botanists to rope down cliffs to hand-pollinate and then go back and collect seed of the *Brighamia insignis* subsp. *napaliensis*, a species now thought to be extinct in the wild but which NTBG has played a central role in successfully cultivating thousands of plants in Hawaiʻi and around the world.

While continuing to work part-time at the Garden, Wichman began his studies in ethnobotany and Hawaiian language at Kauaʻi Community College and eventually at the University of Hawaiʻi – Mānoa where he earned a degree in Horticulture (1983) graduating at the top of his class before returning to work for the Garden.

In the late 1980s, as Wichman advanced from horticulturist and superintendent to Assistant Director of Limahuli Garden, he and his wife Hauʻoli were gifted the nearly 1,000 acre Limahuli Valley over which they assumed stewardship. Located on the northwest coast of Kauaʻi, Limahuli has long been recognized

as one of the earliest places to be settled by the first Hawaiians and is one of the most biodiverse ecoregions in the Hawaiian Islands.

Accepting the *kuleana* or responsibility to protect and preserve Limahuli Valley led to a seven-year effort which resulted in the establishment of Limahuli Valley Special Subzone which demonstrates a novel way to establish a conservation designation for the entire Limahuli Valley.

Under the Chipper and Hau‘oli Wichman’s management, Limahuli Garden’s ancient taro terraces were restored, invasive species were replaced with endemic and indigenous ones, and conservation and education flourished. Wichman also embarked on a four-year Indigenous Communities Mapping Initiative Project at Limahuli that paired the community with Native American communities in the western U.S..

Limahuli Valley has become recognized as a prime example of how botanical gardens can play a leading role in the conservation of plants, the restoration of degraded environments, and the perpetuation of indigenous culture.

In 1994 Chipper and Hau‘oli gifted the entire Limahuli Valley to the National Tropical Botanical Garden and in 1997 Limahuli Garden was named Best Natural Botanical Garden in the United States by the American Horticultural Society.

Speaking in a 2011 PBS interview, Wichman explained how his stewardship of Limahuli taught him the true meaning of *malama ‘āina* (caring for the land). Through the conservation of plants and preservation of Limahuli Valley, Wichman said, we can begin to understand that land is not simply a commodity to be seen in terms of economic value. “‘Āina has so much more to offer us,” he said at the time.

From 1997 to 2002, Wichman also became the Director of NTBG’s Kahanu Garden on Maui before assuming the role of Acting Director of NTBG in 2003, then Director and CEO in 2005. During his tenure as director of the only Congressionally Chartered botanical garden in the U.S., Wichman has traveled tirelessly to garner support and raise the profile of NTBG’s network of five gardens and five preserves in Hawai‘i and Florida, while also advocating globally for the importance of botanical gardens as conduits for plant conservation, research, and education.

As NTBG’s Director, Wichman’s attention turned to a small but ecologically important bay called Lāwa‘i Kai which is adjacent to the NTBG-managed Allerton Garden. Wichman led efforts to create a special subzone that calls for the management and protection of Lāwa‘i Kai within the Conservation District of the State of Hawai‘i. Following years of consultation between community stakeholders, state agencies, Wichman oversaw development of the Lāwa‘i Kai Master Plan. In 2013, then-Governor Neil Abercrombie designated the marine and coastal areas adjacent to NTBG’s Allerton Garden as the Lāwa‘i Kai Special Subzone in order to integrate management of cultural, terrestrial, aquatic, and marine resources while protecting the area as a pu‘u honua or place of refuge.

The two Special Subzones established under Wichman’s leadership at Limahuli Valley and the Lāwa‘i Kai, are the only two such conservation districts in all of Hawai‘i and allow NTBG to manage these unique areas through a cultural lens.

Between 2005 and 2008, Wichman led the design, fundraising, and construction of the Juliet Rice Wichman Botanical Research Center which was the first LEED-certified building built on the island of Kaua‘i. Its innovative green architecture utilizes biomimicry to create a hurricane proof structure and climate controlled environment to house priceless collections of rare books, the most active herbarium in the Pacific, and a seed bank with over 3 million seeds from some of the rarest plants on earth.

In 2008, Wichman and fellow visionaries embarked on a campaign bid on hosting the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)‘s 2016 World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Hawai‘i. With extraordinary diplomatic and logistical hurdles to overcome, the odds of the United States hosting its first ever Congress appeared slim.

Despite this, with Wichman as chair of the WCC steering committee, and in partnership with other farsighted individuals, Hawai‘i‘s eight year-long journey led to a successful bid and the first-ever WCC to convene in the United States in the Congress‘s 68 year history.

The Congress commenced on September 1, 2016 following a visit to Honolulu by President Barack Obama who addressed Pacific Island nations heads of state and Hawai‘i dignitaries on the eve of the ten-day global gathering. With the theme *Planet at the Crossroads*, the quadrennial Congress welcomed a record-breaking 10,300 delegates from 192 countries including global leaders and decision-makers from government, civil society, indigenous people, business, and academia.

The Congress produced over 100 resolutions and the adoption of the Hawai‘i Commitments, a series of global conservation initiatives created to accelerate efforts to protect biodiversity and implement Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, the Congress led to Hawai‘i‘s Governor David Ige funding and enacting an Interagency Biosecurity Plan.

With Wichman‘s selection as the recipient of the 2018 GCA Medal of Honor, NTBG becomes the only botanical garden in which two of its staff have received the prestigious award. In 2016, Dr. Diane Ragone, Director of NTBG‘s Breadfruit Institute received the GCA Medal of Honor for her work with breadfruit to address global hunger.

The special nature of this dual recognition was not lost on Wichman. “It is really quite extraordinary to have two leaders from the same organization receive this prestigious award just two years apart. That really says something about the impact the NTBG is having on the world,” said Wichman. “Several of my heroes and mentors in horticulture and botany have received this award — women and men who made significant contributions to advancing our understanding and appreciation of the natural world through horticulture,” he added.

Renowned botanist Professor Sir Ghilleen Prance, FRS, VMH praised Wichman for developing NTBG into an important resource for conservation, research, and education. Prance said he was delighted to see Wichman receive the GCA‘s Medal of Honor. “This is well-deserved and a tribute to the way in which Chipper has developed NTBG during his time as the Director.”

Peter Raven, President Emeritus of Missouri Botanical, noted that Wichman has been devoted to NTBG for more than 40 years, working “relentlessly and successfully” for the development of the Garden which he called a “true national treasure.”

“For the appreciation of Hawaiian culture, the conservation, and enjoyment of the island’s spectacular native plants, Chipper has few peers. He has made a magnificent and unique contribution,” Raven said.

Among his many previous awards, Wichman was presented with the Outstanding Leadership Award in 2013 by the Hawai‘i Conservation Alliance for his demonstration of exceptional leadership in advancing environmental conservation in Hawai‘i and in 2016 he was presented with the Kāko‘o ‘Āina Award from The Nature Conservancy – Hawai‘i Chapter for his lifetime commitment and passion in conserving biodiversity of Hawai‘i and dedication to the perpetuation of the Hawaiian culture and values.

The Medal of Honor, which has been presented by the Garden Club of America since 1920, follows Wichman’s nomination by the Garden Club of Honolulu which was prepared by a committee with letters of support from botanists Sir Ghillean Prance and Peter Raven, Scot Medbury, President of Brooklyn Botanic Garden, NTBG Chairman of the Board Tom Hewitt, and Betsy Mathews and Heather Henry, both past presidents of the Garden Club of Palm Beach. Hawai‘i’s senior Senator Brian Schatz also submitted a letter in support of Wichman’s nomination.

The Garden Club of America’s Medal of Honor is presented to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the world through their work in horticulture and botany. Between 1920 and 1956, the GCA Medal of Honor was awarded just ten times including its presentation to Henry Francis DuPont, a founding member of NTBG’s Board of Trustees.

In 1949 the Medal was presented to legendary botanist and explorer David Fairchild who himself advocated for the establishment of a national botanical garden in Hawai‘i. In 1975, the Medal was awarded to Harold St. John, a legend in Hawai‘i botanical circles. Following the presentation of the Medal to Dr. Diane Ragone of NTBG’s Breadfruit Institute in 2016, the second presentation to the director of the same organization two years later is unprecedented.

The selection of Chipper Wichman as the 2018 GCA Medal of Honor recipient is also noteworthy as the National Tropical Botanical Garden, had its genesis with longtime Garden Club of Honolulu member Loy McCandless Marks who advocated for the establishment of the organization. That goal came to fruition with the establishment of Pacific Tropical Botanical Garden (now called NTBG) in August 1964.

National Tropical Botanical Garden (www.ntbg.org) is a not-for-profit, non-governmental institution with nearly 2,000 acres of gardens and preserves in Hawai‘i and Florida. The institution’s mission is to enrich life through discovery, scientific research, conservation, and education by perpetuating the survival of plants, ecosystems, and cultural knowledge of tropical regions. NTBG is supported primarily through donations and grants.

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