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Shared Iris Enthusiasm at Garden Dedication to the Late Walter Flory in State Arboretum

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The irises were grateful for the inclement weather while a gathering of iris enthusiasts took shelter under a roofed area exterior to a library building of Blandy Experimental Farm, the site of the State Arboretum of Virginia and the location of the memorial iris garden being dedicated that day, Friday, May 16, to the late Dr. Walter Flory, who worked extensively in this academic environment owned by the University of Virginia. A high volume of student traffic, originating in part from UVA as well as the nation at large, animates Blandy every year as those students come there to study. Botanist, geneticist, educator, and iris enthusiast, Flory had a history with this horticultural sanctuary, studying at Blandy while earning his doctoral degree at UVA in 1931; later, he would return shortly after World War II in 1947 to begin a sixteen-year professorship in experimental horticulture while also serving as vice director and manager of Blandy Experimental Farm and curator of the Orland E. White Arboretum.



The late Dr. Walter Flory, botanist, geneticist, educator, and iris enthusiast.

This is not the first time Flory has been honored by the Blandy community. In 2005, an iris garden was dedicated to him, but it evolved naturally in such a way that it made sense to create the iris garden in its current incarnation, where many irises will bloom again in autumn after blooming in spring. Thom Flory, son of Walter, reflected on his father's legacy, remarking how unique it was to grow up in an environment where there were scarcely any children his age and the lion's share of his friends as he grew up were the people doing academic work. "Irises are important to me because they were important to my father," he said laughingly. "I am not a botanist." Though departing soon, along with several others from his role as a board member of the Foundation of the State Arboretum, which carries the banner for the iris garden, Thom Flory was in good company as the FOSA came together that day to celebrate the values for which his father stood in keeping an herbaceous passion alive.



Thom Flory, son of the late Dr. Walter Flory, addresses an intimate gathering at the dedication of an iris garden to his father.

Two years in the making, the garden has reached maturity, displaying a symbol of faith and hope, known for its slender, tall stalks, both soft and vibrant colors, and its delicate, cascading, and rising colors, to quote the language of the Blandy website. "Design improvements, like a low stone curb wall, now help define planting beds and raise irises higher for better viewing. Widened and compacted stone dust paths increase the garden's accessibility for less mobile visitors and allow viewers to pause and observe up-close the different blooms. Interpretive signage and a seating area complement the beautiful garden setting that presents the Irises grouped by classification. Flowering shrub borders and companion perennials, including many native cultivars, will add interest to the garden when the Irises are outside their early May blooming and October re-blooming seasons. Additional iris species will be added this spring."