



*conejo valley*

**BONSAI** society

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A member of the Golden State Bonsai Federation 

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## **Conejo Valley Bonsai Society Meetings**

(When Covid-19 restrictions are lifted)

**Westlake Village City Hall  
Community Room**  
31200 Oakcrest Drive  
Westlake Village, CA 91361  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the Month**  
**7:30 PM – 9:00 PM**

Visit Our Website  
[www.cvbs-bonsai.org](http://www.cvbs-bonsai.org)

Follow Us on Facebook  
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conejovalleybonsaisociety](http://www.facebook.com/conejovalleybonsaisociety)

### President's Message

## **Bonsai-A-Thon Goes Virtual**

By Marj Branson

The 2021 Bonsai-A-Thon is fast approaching. In normal times, this Golden State Bonsai Federation (GSBF) event is held over a late February weekend at the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens. This year, due to Covid-19 restrictions, rather than the traditional two-day in-person event, it will be a one-day virtual program on Zoom.

The Bonsai-A-Thon will be held on Saturday February 27. It is open to all, but you must pre-register to get the Zoom link.

It is easy to register. Go to: [www.huntington.org/events/virtual-bonsai-thon](http://www.huntington.org/events/virtual-bonsai-thon) and fill out the form. An email confirmation with a virtual ticket will be sent to you.

The program will be in two segments. In the first, which will be from 10:00 – 11:30 AM, the curator of the bonsai collections, Ted Matson, will host a virtual tour of the bonsai courts at the Huntington, the Ben Oki Bonsai Nursery, and the Lifelines/Timelines bonsai exhibition.

The Lifelines/Timelines exhibition asks the question: "How do five venerable bonsai trees relate in age and historical significance to important works in The Huntington's library and art collections?" Lifelines/Timelines compares the age of selected California juniper bonsai with significant pieces in the art collections.

In the second segment, which will be from 1:30 – 3:00 PM, Phillip E. Bloom, the June and Simon K.C. Li Curator of the Chinese Garden at the Huntington, will present the new penjing court and discuss the history of this art form. He is also the Director of the Center of East Asian Garden Studies.

Both sessions will include time for questions from audience members.

This will be a great opportunity to see the bonsai and penjing collections in both the Japanese and Chinese gardens! Note that some of the bonsai belong to the Huntington's own collection, others are in the GSBF collection.

The Conejo Valley Bonsai Society is a member of GSBF, and I encourage all members to sign up for this event. The Feder-

*(Continued on page 8)*



Marj Branson

### CVBS Membership **Please Pay 2021 Dues**

The Conejo Valley Bonsai Society needs your support. You can do this by purchasing from our inventory of bonsai pots (contact Marj Branson) and in the form of annual dues. Still a bargain at \$25 for individuals, \$30 for couples, your dues support CVBS overhead and expenses. Please write a check (payable to the Conejo Valley Bonsai Society) and mail it to: CVBS Membership, c/o Marj Branson, 1169 Triunfo Canyon Road, Westlake Village, CA 91361.

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(Click on Email Address)

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# CVBS Tentative Programs 2021

If you are interested in the CVBS Mentoring Program, please contact  
Marj Branson for more information & applications to participate.

<del>January 21</del>	<del>CANCELED DUE TO CORONAVIRUS 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by Workshop—<b>BRING YOUR TREES</b></del>
February 18	<b>CANCELED DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by <b>DEMONSTRATION: TBA</b>
March 18	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by Workshop— <b>BRING YOUR TREES</b>
April 15	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by <b>DEMONSTRATION: TBA</b>
May 20	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by Workshop— <b>BRING YOUR TREES</b>
June 17	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by <b>DEMONSTRATION: TBA</b>
July 15	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by Workshop— <b>BRING YOUR TREES</b>
August 19	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by Workshop and <b>Swap Meet</b> — <b>BRING YOUR TREES AND OTHER ITEMS</b>
September 16	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting followed by <b>PEER CRITIQUES—BRING YOUR EXHIBITION TREES</b>
October 2 – 3	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> <b>18TH ANNUAL CVBS EXHIBITION</b> Gardens of the World
October 21	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30PM: Brief Meeting followed by Workshop— <b>BRING YOUR TREES</b>
November 18	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM: Brief Meeting with <b>Club Elections</b> followed by <b>DEMONSTRATION: TBA</b>
December 16	<b>TENTATIVE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS</b> 7:30 PM <b>HOLIDAY POTLUCK, RAFFLE &amp; AUCTION</b>

# This Month Begins Potting High Season

By Jim Barrett

**Editor's Note: While the Conejo Valley Bonsai Society's monthly meetings are suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic, our trees still need attention. We will continue to publish Barrett's Bonsai Tips for the duration.**

February and March are probably the best two months of the year for potting and repotting bonsai and training trees from nursery cans to bonsai pots.

Deciding which bonsai needs repotting will depend on how long since its last potting and whether the tree has become root bound.

If the pot does not have a major inside lip, you may want to inspect the root ball by lifting the tree out of the pot. Look for a firm root ball with roots visible all around the sides and bottom.

Another indication that the tree needs repotting is the soil lifting above the edge of the pot. This shows that a mat of roots has formed on the bottom and is pushing the tree up. Trident maple bonsai are noted for this phenomenon.

One important reason for repotting is the tree has matured beyond its present container. Either it has grown larger or it deserves a more appropriate pot.

There are several things to consider when you decide to proceed:

- Decide which tree or trees you want to pot.
- Choose the pot. And it's a good idea to have a standby in case the first one doesn't work.
- Place the wire or heavy plastic screen over each drain hole. Mesh should be at least 1/8 inch holes. Make sure screens are held in place with wire clips.

- If you are going to tie the tree in [the pot], now is the time to install the tie wires. Use a wire of sufficient size and strength to do the job.
- Make sure the pot is clean inside and out.
- Have your favorite [soil] mix handy.

All of the preparations should be done before the root ball is disturbed. Many bonsai are lost or set back if the roots and soil are removed before everything is ready.

Some hobbyists take just enough soil and roots off to place the tree back in its original pot, leaving room for an inch or so of new soil. Others are more aggressive in cleaning out old soil and pruning the roots more severely. Both approaches are valid. It all depends on the condition of the tree, its root system, and the owner's goals for the tree. This all sounds pretty involved or complicated—it isn't, if you use common sense and do not get too rough with the tree.

Aesthetic considerations are:

- Tree and pot harmony or appropriateness.
- Is the tree placed in the pot properly?
- Is the tree planted at the proper angle or attitude?
- Is the front of the tree facing the viewer?

After repotting, place the tree in a shaded area to protect it from the wind. In a week to ten days, place it where you would normally. Wait about a month before fertilizing.

Speaking of fertilizers, you should have started fertilizing with organic fertilizers by now. Miracle Gro® and fast-acting fertilizers are best applied at 1/2 strength. Time-release and slow-acting chemical fertilizers, such as Osmocote® and Woodace®, are safe if you follow printed instructions. Some people add these to their soil mix. 🌱



Jim Barrett

## CVBS Niche Displays

# Virtual Niche Display Program

In normal times, the Niche Program consists of club members setting up mini exhibition displays on a table in our meeting room. But with the Westlake Village City Hall Community Room shuttered for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic, this is not possible.

So we are doing virtual niche displays. We are asking niche display volunteers to set up their displays at home, photograph them, and send the pictures plus some comments (a paragraph or two will do) to our newsletter editor, David Whiteside.

Please note a change in nomenclature for the listing of Virtual Niche Volunteers (right). We now are listing the month of the newsletter issue for each volunteer. For example, Mike Blumenberg provided photos for this, the February 2021 issue (see page 6). Future volunteers, please note that we will be asking you to do the same as long as in-person meetings are not possible.

We encourage all members to sign up for the niche display! Please have a look at your 2021 calendar and let us know when you would like to present your display.

—Marj Branson

2021 Niche Displays (Month of publication)	
Feb.	Mike Blumenberg
March	<b>Volunteer Needed</b>
April	<b>Volunteer Needed</b>
May	<b>Volunteer Needed</b>

## CVBS Membership

# Interested in CVBS?

CVBS is open to anyone interested in the horticultural art of bonsai. If you are not a member, consider joining now. Once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, we will resume meeting on the third Thursday of every month (except for this month of February, which has been canceled—see page 2) in the Westlake Village City Hall Community Room (31200 Oakcrest Drive, Westlake Village, CA 91361). Meetings start at 7:30 PM. Membership includes demonstrations by bonsai experts, workshops, critiques, member swap meets, and this award-winning newsletter.

It's inexpensive and easy to join. Annual dues are \$25 for one, or \$30 for couples. Simply write a check (made payable to the Conejo Valley Bonsai Society) and mail it to: CVBS Membership, c/o Marj Branson, 1169 Triunfo Canyon Road, Westlake Village, CA 91361.

—Nancy Smeets



# Think Out of the Box for Damaged Ficus

By Ken Fuentes

This article started with a question from Mike Blumenberg about why a willow leaf fig (*Ficus salicaria*) would suddenly drop virtually all its leaves. My reply and the continuing discussion of how to develop Mike's ficus are below.

**Ken Fuentes:** My initial response was simply cold temps, maybe. When there is no sun and there are fertilizer/nutrients in the soil, they will drop old leaves and shortly will put out new growth. Because the sun is not strong enough, it will stay in this state until the sun gets stronger and it warms up.

Is that an air layer I see on the lower branch? If it is your intention to remove that branch, what do you see as a design for this bonsai?

**Mike Blumenberg:** That was an air layer I tried last summer that didn't work, so I was just letting things grow. That was working until it dropped all its leaves as I described in my original email. It was step one of the three-step plan that is shown in the attached photo (see bottom right, this page).

My primary goal was to air layer the trunk so I could create a nice tree from the portion above. The stump below would be planted in a big pot or the garden to grow a new trunk (long term plan). The lower branch didn't fit with my plan to air layer the trunk, so my first step was to air layer the branch and then remove it. That air layer, however, failed to generate any roots. So, I'm back to Step 0. I'm planning to try step 1 again this summer (best time to air layer) unless I come up with a better plan. I would be interested in your thoughts.

**Ken:** My advice to you is based on growing this variety of ficus, both in a tropical climate and in a desert (California). In my early years here in California, I attempted many times to air layer a branch with a failure rate of 99%. In Florida, it is the complete reverse. You cannot fool a ficus to grow roots by bagging it and keeping it moist. I am not saying that if you maintained the proper temperature, humidity, and no or low light that it can't be done, but as you found out, they do not grow roots, they just develop ugly scars.

The damaged base on this bonsai has improved significantly in the last two years. When the tree was donated to the club and before it went on auction, I cleaned and did some cutting on the scar. Think out of the box for a moment: That damage is not ugly, it's

**Mike Blumenberg's original three-step plan for developing his willow leaf fig (*Ficus salicaria*) into three trees (far right). Note that it has lost all its leaves, which is where this exchange with Ken Fuentes began.**

**The air layer Mike attempted on the fig's lowest branch (top near right).**

**This is how Mike's ficus appeared when he acquired it (near right). Note the severe damage at the base of its trunk.**

in your mind only. I see it as unique, with character and with a story. Let nature take its course.

If you were able to air layer the trunk above the damaged area, it will take one season for the air layer if you are lucky and you achieve the 1% success rate. From there, you will need at least three to four years to increase the size of the new base to equal the size of the current base, which is appropriate in diameter to the height of the bonsai. That is if you are lucky and a very low branch develops that you can use as a sacrificial branch to help you bulk-up the trunk. On the other hand, if you keep it fertilized and keep cleaning the scared areas for five years, at the same time refining the top, without any risk you will have an incredible bonsai, unique and with character without risk of losing the entire bonsai.

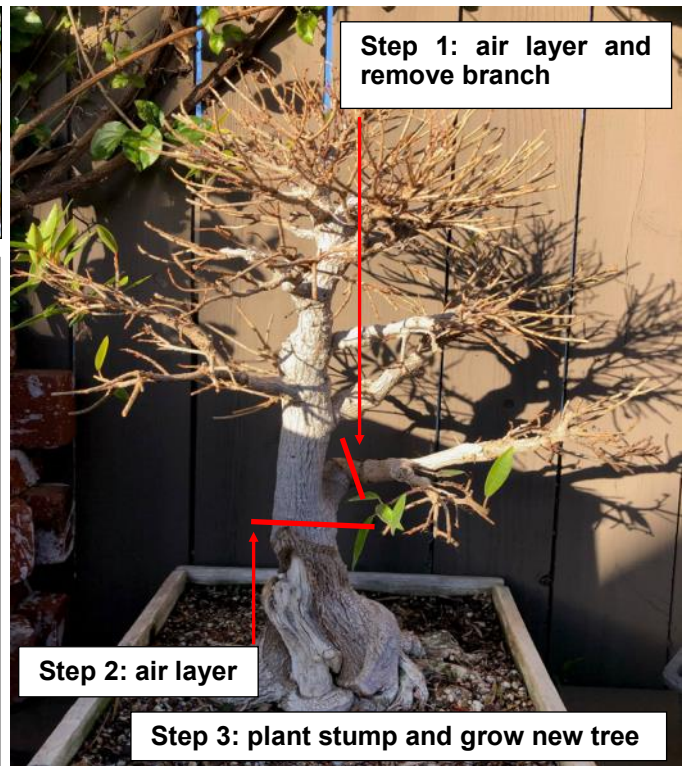
There is a third option: Remove the trunk above the scar, remove all leaves and plant it in well-draining soil and protect it from sunlight, in direct light only after a week. Let the trunk dry out for at least an hour in the shade before planting. Water the soil a day or two before. Take another pot equal in volume and turn container upside down into the new container so the moisture is evenly distributed. Do this many times. The soil cannot be wet. It must be slightly damp. This is essential. The soil should look darker, so you know that it has moisture in it but not wet.

If you are not careful to follow the above steps, it will rot. Before you water, use a chop stick to dig a little for moisture in the soil. Only water if it looks like its drying out, then water lightly. Then cross your fingers.

I also get the feeling that you are not giving this ficus enough light. Once it warms up, this ficus should explode with growth. If it doesn't, it is not getting enough light or fertilizer, or both. Once it gets enough fertilizer and light, it will drop all old leaves and start pushing growth.

I hope this gives you some options, but it's up to you. 🌱

Photos by Mike Blumenberg



# Large Trees and Little Shrubs for Bonsai

By Ken Martin

## Online Video Reviews

I have been aiming my reviews of free online demos to the “how to” for smaller, less expensive trees. It seems to me there is a sharp division between this category and the demos with super refined, super expensive, big trees, and there isn’t much in between.

This month I’ve chosen two leading bonsai artists’ demonstrations to review. Both of this month’s online demonstrations are on YouTube. Both, I feel, are well worth watching.

**Bjorn BJORHOLM**  
Eisei-en, Tennessee

33 minutes

YouTube

“Creating a Juniper Bonsai from Yamadori Material ”

**B**jorn BJORHOLM is one of my favorite online instructors. Even though his nursery is in Tennessee, his instructions do not appear to be region-specific. In this session, he is working on a Rocky Mountain Juniper that was collected in the mountains above Denver in 2013. He had it in his collection near Nashville for a year. Besides regular fertilizer, he’s been foliar feeding it frequently. Even though I doubt any of us are going to have a Rocky Mountain Juniper in our collections, there is a lot of information in this session that can be used on other species. Discussion of deadwood, selecting a front, and heavy bending are just three subjects that come to mind.



**Jason Chan**  
Eastern Leaf Bonsai

12 minutes

YouTube

“Creating a Bonsai from a Shrub: Making the Initial Cuts for Beginners”

**J**ason Chan, owner of Eastern Leaf Bonsai, is another online instructor. Here he uses a five-gallon Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) to show the viewer how to start the process of making a shohin bonsai. He says a shrub can and should be cut back to almost nothing initially and gives the reasons for doing so. He does say that you need to know the species and its ability to recover from this severe pruning.





# Twisting & Cascading Procumbens ‘Nana’

**Editor’s Note:** Mike Blumenberg provided this virtual niche display for this, the February 2021 issue of the Conejo Valley Bonsai Society’s newsletter (see listing of virtual niche volunteers, page 3). Because physical meetings are on indefinite hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, Mike set the display up at home and photographed it himself. Here are some details about this interesting twisted, semi-cascade bonsai.

I purchased this Japanese garden juniper (*Juniperus procumbens* ‘Nana’—or *Juniperus chinensis* var. *procumbens*) at the Conejo Valley Bonsai Society Holiday Auction in December 2019, so it has been under my care for just over a year. According to the club’s records, this juniper was donated by Jason Chan of Eastern Leaf bonsai and garden center, which has a big online presence ([www.easternleaf.com](http://www.easternleaf.com)) but is based in Chino, CA. It already had a good look, spiraling up and then cascading back down. See the “as purchased” photo below.

It had recently been wired extensively, so the only thing I needed to do was to move it from its nursery can into a bonsai pot. I found the square pot at the Bonsai-A-Thon in February 2020 and repotted it shortly afterward.

I removed the original wiring in late 2020 and then re-wired a few branches. I keep this tree prominently displayed and enjoy it “as-is.” The one aspect that I would like to change is the reverse taper seen between the lower and upper trunk. I’ve also tried viewing it from different angles. One view accentuates the trunk while a different view focuses on the cascading main branch. I prefer the view shown below because you can see both the spiraling trunk and the cascading branch to the right.

—Mike Blumenberg

**This twisting semi-cascade garden juniper (*Juniperus procumbens* ‘Nana’) was purchased in the CVBS Holiday Auction in December 2019. Mike moved it from the nursery can in which he bought it (below, left) into the square cascade pot (below right).**



Photos by Mike Blumenberg

# Mobile-Mode Bonsai Library Continues

Just a reminder that while our club meetings are suspended amid the Covid-19 outbreak, I am providing the CVBS Book Mobile! If you want a good bonsai book or DVD to review while staying home, then give me a call and request a book, pamphlet, periodical, or DVD. We'll arrange for it to be sanitized and delivered (or picked up). For a complete list of our library holdings—books, pamphlets, DVDs, and periodicals—please see page 7 of the April 2020 issue of this newsletter.

—Mike Blumenberg

## Book of the Month

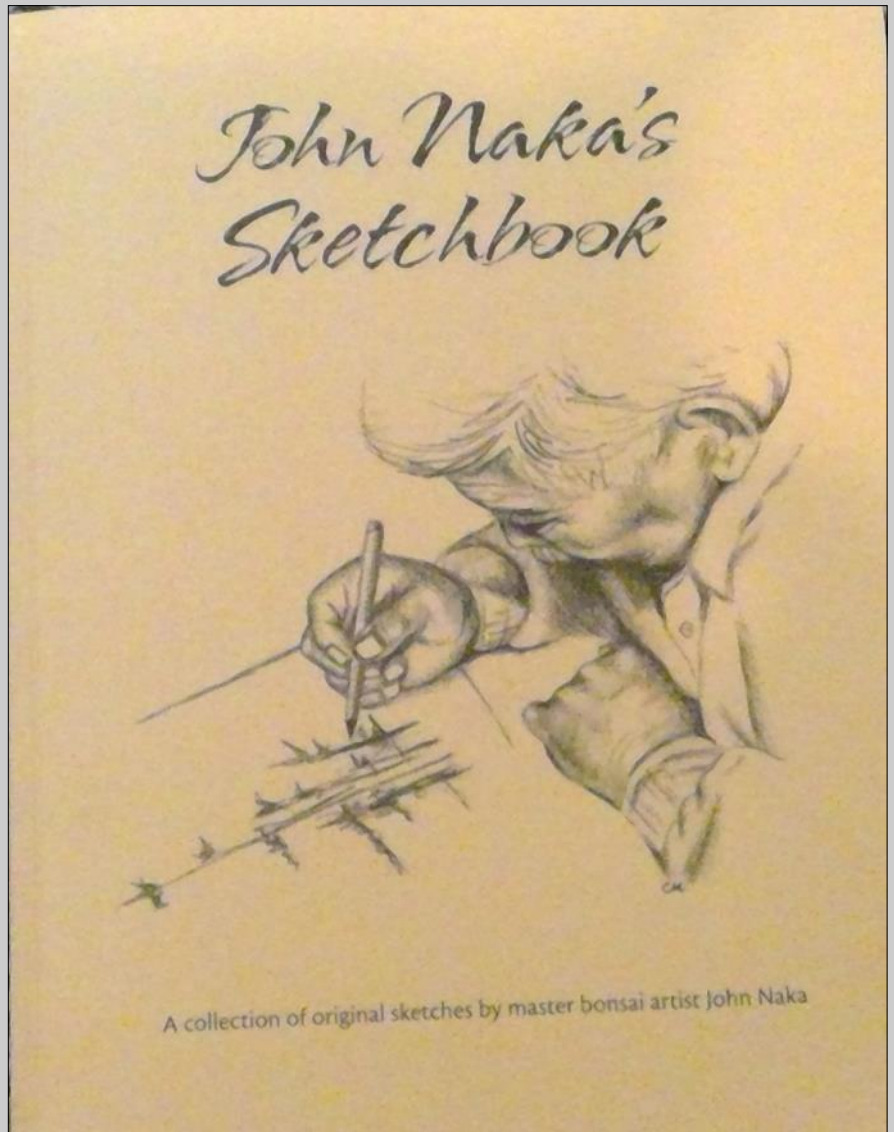
*John Naka's Sketchbook, A Collection of Original Sketches by Master Bonsai Artist John Naka*, compiled by Jack Billet, edited and cover illustrations by Cheryl Manning, published by The National Bonsai Foundation, Washington, D.C., 2005.

This issue's Book of the Month is *John Naka's Sketchbook, A Collection of Original Sketches by Master Bonsai Artist John Naka*, published by the National Bonsai Foundation. The late John Naka spent five decades practicing the art of bonsai and the art of drawing. He would use sketches to describe his vision of a future tree. Naka's sketches gave his students and proteges a glimpse into the future and a guide on how to develop each tree. Although in the book's introduction Naka says of his sketches that "none of them was created to be a work of art," the sketches have proven to be an enduring art form by themselves and many were treasured by the recipients. The creation of this collection started with a request for sketches. The publisher ultimately gathered over 600 sketches from more than 200 persons. The sketches came from across the globe, including the United States, Africa, and Europe. According to the book's compiler, Jack Billet, "No one has taught the art of bonsai to more people than John." A few of Naka's sketches are shown below. You can view the entire collection by checking out this book from the CVBS Library.

—Mike Blumenberg



Photos by Mike Blumenberg





**2021**

**AT PRESS TIME, THERE WERE NO KNOWN IN-PERSON BONSAI SHOWS, EXHIBITIONS, OR EVENTS IN CALIFORNIA SCHEDULED DURING 2021. SOME GARDENS MAY BE OPEN—IF YOU WISH TO VISIT ONE, YOU ARE ADVISED TO CONFIRM STATUS OF THE GARDEN AHEAD OF TIME. THERE ARE SOME VIRTUAL BONSAI EVENTS SCHEDULED OR IN THE WORKS; WE WILL LIST THOSE AS INFORMATION BECOMES AVAILABLE.**

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## **February**

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### **February—Ongoing, 2021 Los Angeles, California / Online**

Japanese American Cultural & Community Center: Bonsai at Home. A Virtual Exhibit on its website that features photographs that JACCC members and bonsai club friends took of their own trees in their home environment. The online exhibit includes two trees from Conejo Valley Bonsai Society members Bob Pressler and David Whiteside. You can find the JACCC Virtual Exhibit at Bonsai at Home — Japanese American Cultural & Community Center ([www.jaccc.org](http://www.jaccc.org)). (If that link doesn't work for you, please try cutting and pasting <https://www.jaccc.org/bonsai-at-home> into your web browser. You may need to press the "Control" key while hovering the cursor over the link.) A great way to get your 2021 bonsai year underway.

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### **February 27, 2021 San Marino, CA**

Annual Huntington Bonsai-A-Thon: The Golden State Bonsai Federation presents its annual Huntington Bonsai-A-Thon virtually this year (due to Covid restrictions). In the morning, Ted Matson, curator of the bonsai collection at The Huntington, hosts videotours of the bonsai courts, the Ben Oki Bonsai Nursery, and the "Lifelines/Timelines" bonsai exhibition. In the afternoon, Phillip E. Bloom, the June and Simon K.C. Li Curator of the Chinese Garden and Director of the Center of East Asian Garden Studies, introduces the garden's new penjing court and discusses the history of this art form. Both sessions include time for questions from audience members. This event will be held online via Zoom. A Zoom link will be sent to attendees in their registration confirmation email. For more information either visit our website at [gsbfhuntington.com](http://gsbfhuntington.com), email [mbailey@huntington.org](mailto:mbailey@huntington.org), or call 626-405-3503.

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#### **President's Message**

*(Continued from page 1)*

ation maintains three Bonsai Collections. They are:

- Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt, Oakland, California
- Bonsai Courts at the Huntington Botanical Gardens—which hosts the Bonsai-A-Thon—San Marino, California
- Clark Center Bonsai Collection, Fresno, California

When travelling, take the time to see these gardens. You can get information and details about each on the GSBF website or on their individual websites.

#### **Dues for 2021**

I would like to thank members who have sent checks for their 2021 dues. If you have not yet sent your renewal check, please do so. You can find details in the box on page 1 and in our Membership Chair Nancy Smeets' item on page 3.

Although we currently are not meeting, certain overhead expenses cannot be avoided. The biggest one is our insurance policy, which we must maintain to be able to resume in-person meetings when that becomes possible, hopefully later this year. Also this year, we incurred the expense of a virtual demonstration by bonsai professional Jim Barrett (see story, January 2021, pages 4 – 5).

To cover these expenses and have the resources in hand to resume in-person demonstrations, we still rely on your membership dues, which are due this month. Membership dues remain only \$25.00 per person or \$30.00 per couple. Please make your check payable to the Conejo Valley Bonsai Society and send it to me. See my mailing address in the box on page 1 and in Membership Chair Nancy Smeets' membership update on page 3.

#### **Virtual Niche Displays**

We are looking for member support for our virtual niche display program. Please see the current display by Mike Blumenberg (page 6). Our most immediate need is for volunteers for the March, April, and May issues (see list on page 3). Beyond that, most later issues remain available. Please consult your 2021 calendar and email me the month you can contribute.

#### **Face Lifts**

Look for fresh looks on our existing website and Facebook page as Damon DuBois, CVBS's Field Trips and Activities planner, turns his tech-savvy hand to those projects. Meanwhile, Damon is working on new forms of online club activities. Stand by for announcements!

#### **Welcome Warm Weather—But Beware**

The recent warm days certainly have been beautiful and pleasant for working on our outdoor bonsai. But the warm sunshine may bring on a false-spring start for our deciduous trees. Keep an eye on them because we could still be in for some cold wet weather, which can kill off new growth. Now is a good time to remove old wires on your trees. And with deciduous trees still devoid of leaves, it's also an opportunity to finetune branch refinement. With the extra time on our hands due to the Covid shut down, it's an opportunity to do the time-consuming detailed bonsai work needed!

Stay safe. 🌱