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DCH Restores Kennett Pike's Memorial Cherry Trees for Garden Club of Wilmington's Centennial Project

Wilmington, DE – In celebration of its centennial, the Garden Club of Wilmington (GCW) envisioned restoring the cherry trees along the Kennett Pike at Lower Brandywine Presbyterian Church. These trees were originally planted in 1918 as GCW's first community project. A century later, GCW partnered with the Delaware Center for Horticulture (DCH) to revitalize an important section of the Brandywine Valley National Scenic Byway. Last week, DCH completed the Garden Club of Wilmington's (GCW) Centennial Community Project with the installation of the memorial cherry trees along Kennett Pike.

"We are incredibly grateful to have the opportunity to work with GCW on this celebrated project, especially in light of our intertwined histories," said Vikram Krishnamurthy, DCH's Executive Director. "Founded in 1977 by GCW members and through a generous gift by Emily du Pont, DCH has become Delaware's leading organization dedicated to beautifying public landscapes and advising on tree placements along the streets and roads of our community. This endeavor is particularly meaningful to us in light of the fact we have the opportunity to execute a project with such historical significance for an organization that has played such an integral role in our existence."

The project, "*Pink Pearls: Centennial Restoration of Kennett Pike's Memorial Cherry Trees*," incorporates a significant amount of GCW's history while restoring an important aspect of one of Delaware's most notable scenic highways. Founded in 1918 at the end of World War I, GCW embarked on its first Community Project planting a row of weeping Japanese cherry trees at Lower Brandywine Presbyterian Church to honor local heroes who died in the war. The trees and their beautiful pink blossoms in the spring were a special landmark for decades; however, over the years, the trees declined and were replaced with a variety of tree species. To celebrate the centennial, DCH and GCW, in collaboration with the Kennett Pike Association and Lower Brandywine Presbyterian Church, replanted this stretch of Kennett Pike with 12 Japanese cherry trees, recreating the original splendor of these memorial trees and blossoms. Execution of the project also involved cooperative partners and agencies, including DelDOT and Davey Tree Expert Company, to obtain the required approvals and permits.

"This project is the most fitting way to celebrate the Garden Club's Centennial, and we are thrilled to bring the radiance of the Japanese cherry trees back to Kennett Pike," said Marion du Pont, GCW's President. "To craft a project honoring the sacrifice of our WWI heroes and the history of our organization in the same endeavor while beautifying Kennett Pike shows us how deeply committed DCH is to supporting GCW's mission while fulfilling its own."



This project is a continuation of DCH’s involvement in the history of Kennett Pike. The roadway, which was built as a toll road between 1811 and 1813, was purchased in 1919 by P. S. du Pont, who then widened, paved, and sold it to the State of Delaware for \$1. As a gift to his wife, Alice, Mr. du Pont had a 10-mile string of oak, sycamore, and elm trees, which she lovingly referred to her “pearls,” planted along the newly built Kennett Pike. In fact, Mr. du Pont’s gift may well have inspired the first planting of the Japanese cherry trees by the GCW. In 2004, DCH was a leading partner in developing the analysis and successful proposal to the U. S. Department of Transportation to designate Kennett Pike as a National Scenic Byway. Krishnamurthy, who was then DCH’s Community Forester, inventoried and mapped the trees along the Kennett Pike as part of this petition, which informed DCH’s understanding and appreciation for the byway, its beauty, and the scenic view sheds the national designation preserves.

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