



## **Donor commits funds to launch Arboretum at Penn State**

**Friday, May 18, 2007**

University Park, Pa. -- Penn State President Graham B. Spanier announced today (May 18) a gift commitment of \$10 million from University alumnus and State College resident Charles H. "Skip" Smith to launch construction of The Arboretum at Penn State. The University's Board of Trustees will recognize this lead gift by naming the H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens in honor of Charles Smith's late father, a State College contractor and real estate developer.

Occupying nearly 400 acres of land extending west and north from Park Avenue to the Mount Nittany Expressway, the Arboretum will be open to the public. The master plan for the arboretum, developed by the University in conjunction with the firm Marshall-Tyler-Rausch, includes plantings of species from around the world and state-of-the-art educational and research facilities. Future plans for the Arboretum include an education and visitors center, conservatory and children's garden.

"Mr. Smith shares the University's vision of The Arboretum at Penn State as a place where students, families and researchers can all learn more about the natural world," said Spanier. "His extraordinary commitment will allow us to make that vision a reality and move forward with a project that will be a destination for thousands of visitors and a year-round resource for our community. All of us who admire and wish to preserve the physical beauty of Penn State and central Pennsylvania should be pleased."

Smith's lead gift commitment to the Arboretum will allow construction to begin by the fall of 2007. The first stage of the multi-phase project is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2008. The initial phase will include an overlook pavilion and conservatory terrace to allow visitors to view construction progress, and an event lawn, rose garden and area for demonstrating horticultural techniques. These areas, as well as other formal gardens and facilities visible from Park Avenue, will be part of the H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens.

"The H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens will create an educational environment unlike any other in Penn State's history," said Kim Steiner, professor of forest biology and director of the project. "With plantings and facilities on par with the best university gardens in the country, these gardens are going to be a wonderful asset to many programs in sciences and arts throughout the University. Having discussed the Arboretum plans with hundreds of alumni, area residents, faculty members and students, I know that the historic announcement of Mr. Smith's gift is going to be received with great enthusiasm."

A native of Williamsport, Harry O. "H. O." Smith was a member of Penn State's class of 1920. For several years after his graduation, he served on the University's architectural engineering faculty before starting his own business, the State College Construction Co. His firm was responsible for a number of area landmarks, including the Greyhound Post House along North

Atherton Street, the first permanent seating at Memorial Field, and a number of University buildings and fraternity houses. H.O. Smith served two terms as a State College borough councilman and was active in many organizations, including the Boy Scouts and Sigma Phi Sigma fraternity. His experiences as a Penn State student are preserved in several pocket diaries, now in the University archives.

"I've been enthused about this endeavor since the 1990s, when I first learned of Penn State's dedication to the current location," said Charles Smith. "The H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens are expected to bring together people from across the Commonwealth and around the world, and they will traverse the very space that, as a freshman, H.O. hiked at length. The gardens will also be a beautiful gateway to the University Park campus, and I'm sure my father would feel honored."

Smith's gift is a momentous event for Penn State. Various plans to create an arboretum at the University date back to 1914.

"The full development of the Arboretum will depend almost entirely on private funds, and this project will now become a priority in our new University-wide campaign," said Rodney P. Kirsch, senior vice president for Development and Alumni Relations. "There are many wonderful philanthropic opportunities within the H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens and throughout the Arboretum, such as the orchard, the event lawn and the demonstration gardens, that I know will be attractive to other benefactors. I have every confidence that Mr. Smith's generosity will inspire other alumni and friends to support this landmark project."

Charles H. "Skip" Smith graduated from Penn State with a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering in 1948. Along with his brothers and fellow Penn State graduates James B. Smith and Thomas L. Smith, Charles joined his father in the firm H.O. Smith and Sons, a real estate development and rental company established in 1951. Charles Smith in 1950 also founded State College Television Co., now State College Audio-Visual Supply, owned by his son John.

For video of the planned Arboretum and Smith's gift, visit [http://x02.ur.psu.edu/video/in\\_motion/arboretum\\_gift.html](http://x02.ur.psu.edu/video/in_motion/arboretum_gift.html) online.

To learn more about the future development plans for The Arboretum at Penn State and the H. O. Smith Botanic Gardens, contact Steiner at (814) 865-9351 or visit the Arboretum at <http://www.arboretum.psu.edu> online.

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