

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Vail ecologist bringing national attention to Betty Ford Alpine Gardens

VAIL, Colo. (July 10, 2006) — For Nicola Ripley, there's more to tending the world's highest botanic gardens than just having a green thumb.

The Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, for whom Ripley serves as director of horticulture and research, are proud to announce she has been elected to the board of directors of the American Public Gardens Association. The honor came at the association's annual meeting last month in San Francisco.

"It's a great honor to represent not only the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, but the many small botanic gardens across the United States, as well," says Ripley, a native of England, who moved to the Vail Valley 16 years ago, joining the nonprofit organization's staff in 1996.

With a master's degree in ecology from University College of North Wales, Ripley has emerged as one of the nation's leading specialists in alpine environments — or "those above timberline," she says. In addition to overseeing the plant collection and research projects at the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens — at 8,200 feet above sea level in Vail's Ford Park, it's the highest known botanic garden in the world — she travels constantly, giving talks and slide shows to botanic clubs and societies across the United States.

In Colorado, Ripley also offers her expertise to the general public as a member of the Eagle County Open Space Advisory Committee.

"I'm always interested in conservation and open space," says Ripley, who lives in Eagle. "It's both rewarding and frustrating, but I feel I'm making a valuable contribution."

In her new role with the American Public Gardens Association, Ripley will be promoting the organization's exhibit next year during its annual meeting at the U.S. Botanical Gardens, in Washington D.C. The association aims to use the exhibit as a launching pad for bigger and better things in the world of biodiversity, emulating successful promotions by advocates for threatened and endangered animals. Specific goals include educating members of the U.S. Congress on the plight of rare and endangered plants, as well as educating directors of public gardens throughout the United States on how to lobby for federal funds.

“My particular interest is in bringing national awareness to the role small public gardens can play in global plant conservation and biodiversity,” says Ripley. “Everyone’s aware of the plight of endangered animals; it’s the same with protecting rare plants. We need to get people talking about it.”

Before coming to the United States, Ripley worked for some of the giants in the field, including the Nature Conservancy Council and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, in England. And for five years, she was co-owner and director of Montane Environmental Solutions Ltd, an environmental consulting company based in Eagle County that conducted rare plant studies, environmental-impact analyses and wetland surveys for private and governmental clients.

The American Public Gardens Association, based in Wilmington, Del., strives to serve and strengthen public gardens by supporting their work, value, and achievements in horticultural display, education, research and plant conservation. Ripley’s expertise will be invaluable in the APGA’s mission, says the association’s executive director, Dan Stark.

“Nicola Ripley is extremely important to us. Not only does she bring the perspective of a small public garden, like the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, but she represents a large geographic region, the interior West, as well,” says Stark. “As an organization, we’re always looking to diversify our board of directors.

The Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, founded in 1986, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for which operations and programs are funded entirely through the generosity of donors. The organization’s primary fund-raiser this year is the first annual Spirit of Betty Ford Award gala honoring the Gardens’ founder and inspiration, Helen Fritch, to be held at the Gardens in Vail’s Ford Park on Aug. 6. President Gerald Ford and Betty Ford are expected to attend.

Tickets to the first annual Spirit of Betty Ford Award gala are available at the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, at Alpine Treasures in Vail Village, and at the Gardens’ booth at the Vail Farmers Market on Sundays.

For more information, call 970-476-0103 or visit www.bettyfordalpinegardens.org.

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