

Daffodils signal garden season in Bristol, R.I.

BRISTOL, R.I. — A sure sign of spring are the thousands of blooming daffodils and early wildflowers in Blithewold's gardens on the shores of Narragansett Bay. The grounds of the 1908 mansion are a melange of color and scents during the annual Daffodil Days April 12-May 4. Though the yellow-and-white flowers are the centerpiece of the festival, visitors can stroll the Great Lawn with its bay views or linger in gardens, both classic and more informal.

The 17th-century English country-styled manor, complete with gargoyles and crests, was built as the summer home of Augustus Van Wickle, a Brown University graduate who became a coal baron in Pennsylvania. The 45-room mansion anchors the grounds with its 33 acres of gardens and striking trees, such as a 90-foot giant sequoia, ginkgo, and weeping pagoda.

Afternoon teas with scones and assorted desserts are served in the mansion's dark oak-paneled dining room overlooking the water Wednesday through Friday at 2 and 3 o'clock. Special children's teas will be served at 2 o'clock on April 16-18. Don't miss the Butler's Pantry with its displays of china, silver, and crystal.

The mansion also houses such indoor exhibits as floral arrangements, paintings from nature by area artists, and the Colonial Dames of America's collection of Besie McKee's (Van Wickle's widow) turn-of-the-20th-century hats. But during Daffodil Days, garden variety visitors want to be outside.

Daffodil Days, April 12-May 4. Blithewold Mansion, Gardens and Arboretum, 101 Ferry Road, Bristol, R.I., 401-253-2707, blithewold.org. Adults \$10, seniors and students \$8, children under 17 free. Afternoon tea \$10 (plus admission). Grounds and gardens open daily 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; self-guided tours of mansion and gardens Wednesday-Sunday 10-4. Directions: Bristol is about 60 miles, or about an hour, from Boston. Take Interstate 93 to Route 24 south. In Fall River, take exit onto I-195 west for one exit and then return to Route 24, following signs to Newport, R.I. After crossing the Sakonnet River Bridge, take Rhode Island exit 2 (Bristol/Mt. Hope Bridge). Take a right at the end of the ramp and cross Mount Hope Bridge. Bear left at the fork on Route 114 (Ferry Road) and Blithewold is a quarter mile on the left.

MARTY BASCH

Portland museum appeals to all ages

By Janet Mendelsohn
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PORTLAND, Maine — Fine art museums can be heavy and intimidating or, like the Portland Museum of Art, they can be light, airy places of inspiration and discovery. While not designed specifically for children, it says a lot about the place that youngsters and teens appear to be as immersed in its exhibits as the adults are.

"Our goal is to get kids, and all our visitors, to slow down," said Stacy Rodenberger, coordinator of school programs. "We want people to see what's happening in a work of art and talk about it."

Maine's largest and oldest public art museum, founded in 1882, owns more than 18,000 works of fine and decorative art from the 18th century to the present, including pieces by Degas, Monet, Picasso, and Renoir. Not surprisingly, there is a special emphasis on artists with ties to Maine like Rockwell Kent, Fitz Henry (Hugh) Lane, Marsden Hartley, Louise Nevelson, and the Wyeths, N.C., Andrew, and Jamie. There is also an impressive collection of watercolors and drawings by Winslow Homer, whose studio at nearby Prouts Neck was acquired in 2006 by the museum. It hopes to open the space to the public in 2010 after a restoration.

The museum buildings themselves have historical and architectural significance. "This may be the only museum in the country where you can see exhibits in three buildings designed in three architecturally significant periods," said Kristen Levesque, a museum spokeswoman.

Margaret Jane Mussey Sweat, a 19th-century writer and literary critic, deeded McLellan House, a three-story Federal mansion, to the Portland Society of Art upon her death in 1908. The McLellan House today offers insights into architecture and daily life circa 1801.

Sweat also donated money in memory of her husband, Lorenzo de Medici Sweat, for a gallery building, which was designed by John Calvin Stevens, a well-known Portland architect. That building was recently restored to its original Beaux Arts grandeur. A modern addition, designed by I.M. Pei & Partners in 1981, represents the core of the museum and its front entrance.

Through May 11, the museum is featuring the exhibition "New Natural History," which presents 25 works by contemporary Maine artists inspired by old forms of scientific inquiry. Graphic arts will be showcased April 10-June 1 in "The Powerful Hand of George Bellows: Drawings from the Boston Public Library," featuring 57 drawings and prints not been seen publicly since the 1950s.



AMELIA CARIGNAN/PORTLAND MUSEUM OF ART (ABOVE); CRAIG BECKER

The Portland Museum of Art's 1983 addition designed by I.M. Pei has become a city landmark. Dahlov Ipcar (1917-), who paints and illustrates children's books, was the artist whose exhibit entranced this boy.



"Georgia O'Keeffe and the Camera: The Art of Identity" is a collaboration of the museum and the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, where it will be exhibited after its June 12-Sept. 7 showing

here. Twelve paintings by O'Keeffe, among the 20th century's most widely recognized artists, will be paired with 60 portraits of her by such celebrated photographers as Ansel Adams, Yousef Karsh,

If you go . . .

Portland Museum of Art

7 Congress Square
Portland, Maine
207-775-6148
portlandmuseum.org
Tuesday-Sunday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.,
Friday till 9. Memorial Day-Colombus
Day, open Monday 10-5. Adults \$10,
seniors and students with ID \$8,
ages 6-17 \$4, under 6 free.

Directions: Portland is about 110 miles, or two hours, from Boston. Take Interstate 93 north to Route 1 north toward the Tobin Bridge. Merge onto US 1 north. Merge onto Interstate 95 north. Get on I-295 north via exit 44 and follow it to exit 6A (Forest Avenue south). At the first light, bear right on Route 77, State Street. Drive through the park. At the top of the hill, turn left onto Congress Street. The museum is on the right after the next light. By train, Amtrak's Downeaster from North Station goes to Portland, where you can pick up the Portland Explorer Shuttle downtown (\$5 round trip), to the Eastland Park Hotel, across from the museum.

Irving Penn, and Alfred Stieglitz.

While the museum offers much for adults, it tries hard to offer something for art lovers of all ages. The museum has a free Kid Cards educational program. Available at the information desk, the six-piece set serves as an introduction to how to look at art. One card features the oil painting "Mount Katahdin from Millinocket Camp" by Frederic Edwin Church. Rodenberger says the cards help foster conversation about art.

"Imagine traveling into the painting, being at Mount Katahdin," she said. "The card asks: What do you see? How does it make you feel?" Youngsters can draw and write on the cards, then combine them in a book to take home.

"On a daily basis, kids are bombarded with visual imagery," says Rodenberger. "We're giving them, and adults, a chance to look at art together and talk about what's important to them, what the other person thinks, how it's different."

Janet Mendelsohn, a freelance writer in Somerville, can be reached at janet@janetmendelsohn.com.

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