WHAT: Planting of potentially blight and *Phytophthora* root-rot resistant American chestnuts

WHERE: Biltmore, Asheville, NC

WHEN: Monday, April 29, 2013 at 10:00 am

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 25, 2013

**Biltmore Participates in Effort to Restore American Chestnut Trees to Eastern Forests**

Asheville, NC

Monday, April 29, 2013 at 10 am, volunteers from the Carolinas Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) will gather to plant 100 potentially blight and root-rot resistant American chestnut seeds on the grounds of Biltmore in Asheville, NC. American chestnuts were formerly common on the estate, but were almost wiped out by a blight in the twentieth century. The chestnut seeds are part of a unique breeding program headed up by TACF to restore the American chestnut to the eastern forests of America.

A previous breeding orchard planted in 1997 at Biltmore eventually failed due to the trees’ susceptibility to *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, a pathogen that thrives in parts the southern range of the American chestnut and is lethal to most American chestnuts.

“The chestnut seeds we will plant on Monday come from two beautiful trees that not only have exceptional blight resistance and excellent American qualities, but they also carry genes for *Phytophthora* resistance as well,” said Tom Saielli, Southeast Regional Science Coordinator for TACF. “After screening for blight and Phytophthora resistance, and American traits, the selected trees will ultimately be used in the Carolinas Chapter of TACF breeding program to breed more healthy trees for restoration.”

“We are proud to partner with the American Chestnut Foundation to do our part in this exciting and ongoing effort to restore the chestnut to our country’s forests,” said Bill
Alexander, Biltmore’s forest and landscape historian. “When George Vanderbilt created Biltmore in the 1890s, his landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, advised him to make most of the 125,000 acres a systematically managed forest as a model for the country. His first forester, Gifford Pinchot who later became the first chief of the U. S. Forest Service, recorded that the American chestnut was the most dominant tree species in Vanderbilt’s mountainous Pisgah Forest tract, but ranked sixth among the second growth trees on the main estate. Pinchot’s successor, Dr. Carl A. Schenck, conducted successive plantings of native chestnuts, oaks, pines and other species to reforest several thousand acres of abandoned pastures on the estate from 1895 to 1909. In 1898, Schenck requisitioned 1 million chestnut seedlings from the Biltmore Nursery for reforestation, but only half of the order could be filled. Their future, however, was sealed when the chestnut blight arrived. Today, Biltmore continues the legacy of good forest management established by those early pioneers in forestry.”

Once the mighty giants of the eastern forests, American chestnuts stood up to 100 feet tall, and numbered in the billions. They were a vital part of the forest ecology, a key food source for wildlife and an essential component of the human economy. In 1904 the fungal pathogen responsible for chestnut blight, accidentally imported from Asia, spread rapidly through the American chestnut population. By 1950 it had killed virtually all the mature trees from Maine to Georgia. Several attempts to breed blight resistant trees in the mid-1900s were unsuccessful.

Then in 1983, a dedicated group of scientists formed The American Chestnut Foundation and began a special breeding process, which in 2005 produced the first potentially blight-resistant trees called Restoration Chestnuts 1.0. Now assisted by nearly 6,000 members and volunteers in 16 state chapters, the organization is undertaking the planting of Restoration Chestnuts 1.0 in select locations throughout the eastern US as part of the Foundation’s early restoration efforts.

Volunteers for the planting are asked to meet at 10 am in the parking area next to Biltmore’s Group Sales office at 1 Lodge St., Asheville, NC 28803. Please bring a lunch, gloves, water, and dress for the weather. Press interested in covering the event, please contact Tom Saielli at tom@acf.org or (828) 450-9100.

TACF is a 501(c) (3) conservation organization headquartered in Asheville, NC. For more information on TACF and their work to restore the American chestnut tree, contact Paul Franklin at (828) 281-0047, email: pfranklin@acf.org or visit www.acf.org.