



THE BUR

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Newsletter of the New York State Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation

Spring 2019

Part II: The Long and Difficult Road to the World's First Blight-Resistant Chestnut SUNY-ESF / NY-TACF Partnership Produces Science Breakthroughs

By John Neumann, NY-TACF Secretary & Vice President for Education

In part I of "The Long and Difficult Road" we reviewed the familiar story of the American chestnut in our eastern forests, the effects of the blight, the formation of the American Chestnut Foundation, and the hybrid backcross breeding program. We then shifted to four TACF members from New York State who in 1988 proposed an alternative research approach, using biotechnology to develop a blight-tolerant American chestnut, suitable for crossing with wild-type American chestnut trees in every region of its natural range. The four New Yorkers eventually founded the first state chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation and formed a partnership with SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF), with the goal of pursuing transgenic research. Vision and determination characterize our four founders. Find out what their stories are and what inspired them to achieve so much on behalf of the American chestnut.

Herbert F. Darling, Jr.

Herb and Jane Darling live in Buffalo, NY and own forested land in Zoar Valley in the far western part of the state. In 1988, a friend who was hunting on their property discovered a large American chestnut tree, deep in their woods. He informed Herb, who quickly investigated what turned out to be a 24" diameter at breast height, 80 foot tall American chestnut tree, that had thus far escaped the blight. Many years later, Herb wrote "the discovery of the large American chestnut on my property was the original inspiration which caused me to search and find TACF and to join." Herb Darling went on to serve as our chapter president for 24

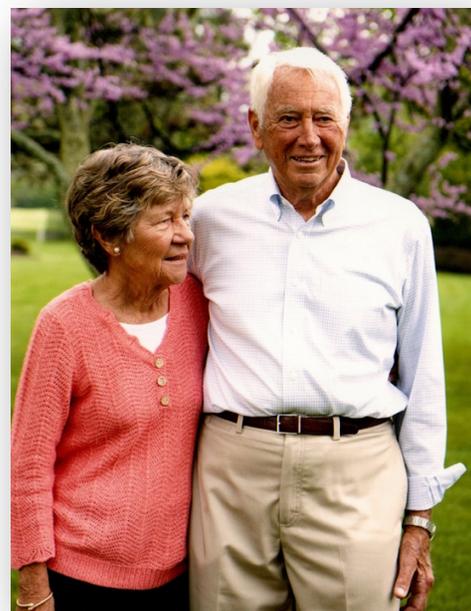
years. A natural leader, Herb recruited others to our board of directors and headed up our efforts to provide the needed funds for the ESF chestnut research project. Herb's leadership was so evident that he was also elected president of TACF and chairman of TACF board of directors. He was honored by ESF with the 2015 Feinstone Environmental Award. Herb claims his greatest honor was that ESF named the world's first proven blight-tolerant American chestnut tree "Darling".

Jane Darling

Jane Darling not only encouraged and supported all of Herb's efforts, she shared his commitment and vision. The discovery of that big American chestnut tree on their Zoar Valley property inspired Jane, too. She got their whole family involved in learning about and planting chestnut trees. Herb said that Jane was his chief advisor, especially about people. Several times, this writer noticed that when Herb was speaking at a meeting, Jane was not looking at him, but at people in the group. I believe she was gauging their reactions to what Herb was saying. I can only imagine the conversations Jane and Herb had after every meeting. Jane also did what needed to be done on the spot, to insure that our meetings and events ran smoothly. Often working closely with Arlene Wirsig and Bethany Ruane, Jane attended to every detail.

Stanley Wirsig

Stan and Arlene Wirsig were TACF members who resided near Syracuse, NY. They both were inspired by the American chestnut in family history for generations.



Jane and Herb Darling, NY-TACF Co-Founders

Stan was a retired research scientist and believed it would be good policy and good science for TACF to sponsor an alternative to their backcross breeding program.

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President's Message



New York State Chapter
The American Chestnut Foundation
302 Bateman Road
Laurens, NY 13796
<https://www.acf.org/ny/>

Founded in 1990, the New York State Chapter (NY-TACF) is the oldest chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation, Inc., a non-profit 501 (c) (3) membership organization. NY-TACF, in partnership with the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, is working to restore the American chestnut tree to our eastern forests by developing truly blight-resistant American chestnut trees through biotechnology. Membership information may be found on the back page of *The Bur*.

Officers

(Terms End at the 2020 Annual Meeting)

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Vice President for Science - John Dougherty
Vice President for Education - John Neumann
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Herbert F. Darling, Jr.*	Dale Travis
John Dougherty	Richard Wells
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Paul Ackermen	Linda McGuigan
James Donowick	Enrico Nardone
Emmett Hoops*	T. Urling Walker
Roy Hopke	Laurence Windhouser
Ted Kozlowski	

*Executive Committee

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Linda McGuigan – *The Bur* Editor



The number one question I am asked is when will the blight tolerant transgenic American chestnut trees be approved for distribution? It is anticipated sometime in 2020 and as soon as we have any definitive information on this, we will notify all members.

Looking at the New York chapter's achievements and progress, I am extremely thankful for everything that the board and directors, along with all the members, have accomplished.

First I would like to point out that we are a totally volunteer chapter with no paid staff. Production of the BUR, which I think is great, is done by Linda McGuigan and John Neumann. Linda

is also instrumental in setting up the meetings we have at ESF and John works on numerous other projects as Secretary and VP of Education, such as designing the new logo on the left side of this page. Directors have been busy with numerous projects: tending the orchards that produce the nuts for our mother tree program and collecting those nuts in the fall; giving presentations; and handing out nuts and seedlings. District 5 Director and VP of Outreach, Emmett Hoops even has a blog that can be accessed here, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-village-chestnut-tree/id1392810296>. Niko Nantsis, our new Co-Director for District 1, started a large number of seedlings that he distributed to people around the Long Island area. My wife Fran, as Treasurer, keeps track of membership dues and fund raiser donations; sends out all the thank you letters; and helps me post and mail the Spring and Fall issues of the BUR. Lawrence Windhauser has made several displays for us to use and volunteered to contact all members with expired memberships in 2018. Through everyone's efforts, our membership keeps increasing and is now close to 700.

Next, we have the members who have invested an untold amount of time, money, and effort in supporting our chapter with fundraising and planting mother trees, both of which are critical to our success.

My sincere thanks to all members for all they do and for all they have accomplished as we approach the day when we can start planting truly blight tolerant American chestnuts back into the forest.

Allen Nichols
President, NY-TACF
fajknichols.75@gmail.com
(607) 263-5105



District Reports

Niko Nantsis, District 1

Hi everyone! I have been super busy these past couple of months. After getting all of my American chestnut seeds from both foraging and from the meeting in October, I put them into the refrigerator and let them stratify for 4 months. They were then planted in pots and put into the greenhouse. Many of my saplings are now over a foot or a foot and a half in height and they are healthy as can be. Eric Powers and I will be searching for more American chestnuts on Long Island and we plan to do large scale pollinations this year. I gave a large portion of my trees to an organic farm way out east so they can start an orchard for us. I am very excited to do a lot more work this year. I also found a really great fertilizer for growing chestnuts and it has been going well so far. It is called Alaska Fish Fertilizer and it has worked wonders on my Saplings.

Dale Travis, District 2

We have been quite successful with planting mother trees this spring, including an arrangement made by TACF member Tim Savage at the Queens Farm Museum. On Earth Day, eight of Tim's second year seedlings were planted in the classic pattern (see photos on the right), saving the middle spot for the eventual resistant seedling, coming soon. The Queens Farm Museum is part of the NYC Parks Department and is a fully operational farm, open to the public. Many public events are organized each year with a large amount of participation from the public school system. They are a very active group and very enthusiastic about the American Chestnut restoration. We were very fortunate to have Linda McGuigan join us. She drove down from Syracuse to take part and added a great deal of prestige. We were even joined by a young lady and her mother who had wanted to do something special for Earth Day and decided to come to the museum. She was so excited. Just the kind of next generation interest we need.

Allen Nichols, District 4

It was another busy spring, with mailing out over 5,000 nuts for mother trees to over 300 planters. I gave presentations to the Maryland Historical Society and John Burrough's Woodchuck Lodge; I also had exhibits at the Annual SUNY Cobleskill Fish and Wildlife Exhibit and the Morris Central School Academic fair. While on a trip to Long Island, I met with District 1's Co-Director Niko Nantsis, and delivered 300 nuts for mother trees. I also collected samples of Cruddy Bark from trees on Long Island which will be used for inoculating blighted trees.



Emmett Hoops, District 5

We've handed out over 600 seedlings and nuts to nearly 70 groups and individuals. Foremost is the 4-H of northern New York, where there is a lot of potential for membership growth. I've been invited back to Paul Smith's College for a talk to incoming students of forestry in September 2019, and a return engagement to the Science Teachers of the State of New York convention in late September. This event takes place at Siena College in Loudonville, New York. There seems to be a greater public awareness of the American chestnut, and I ascribe this to the excellent outreach done by SUNY-ESF.



Crystal Yorke and her daughter Lilan, planting an American chestnut mother tree.



From left to right: Linda McGuigan; Dale Travis; James Trent, Board chairman of QFM; Jennifer Weprin, Director of QFM, and Tim Savage, thank you Tim.

- District 1** – Enrico Nardone, EGNardone@Seatuck.org and Niko Nantsis, nikolaos.nantsis@gmail.com
- District 2** – Dale L. Travis, dale@daletravis.com
- District 3** – Frank Munzer, MunzerFrank@gmail.com
- District 4** – Allen Nichols, fajknichols.75@Gmail.com
- District 5** – Emmett Hoops, emmett.hoops@gmail.com
- District 6** – Peter S. Pike Sr., northernpiker1@aol.com
- District 7** – Roy Hopke, SnowHawke1@gmail.com
- District 8** – Paul Ackerman, trapman1@netzero.net
- District 9** – William A. Snyder, wasnyderhort@gmail.com

NY-TACF Launches Campaign to Raise \$75,000

Our board of directors approved a chapter expenditure of \$50,452 to honor a request from SUNY-ESF's American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project. The \$50,452 was needed to staff a "geared up" field and greenhouse operation for another year. With this funding, increased numbers of transgenic Darling trees (the world's first blight-resistant American chestnuts) are being grown for the purpose of distribution. The purpose of this campaign is to replenish the \$50,452 that we expended to honor the ESF request; any additional funds raised would strengthen our financial ability to deal with future needs. Our aim is to raise \$75,000 and we have nearly reached that goal with just over \$65,000! We only need \$10,000 more to reach our goal.

If every member of our chapter contributed as each could afford, we are confident we can reach, or even exceed, that goal. As a dedicated member of our chapter, you understand the importance of our mission to restore America's most iconic tree. Your support is needed. My wife Fran and I contributed \$2,000 to start off the campaign and we recently received a pledge for over \$5,000

Thanks to everyone who has donated, and anyone that has not, know that every donation helps.

Checks can be made out NY-TACF and mailed to:

NY-TACF Treasurer Fran Nichols
302 Bateman Road
Laurens, NY 13796

If you wish to contribute by credit card, use the TACF link <https://www.acf.org/store/donate/> and select "Biotechnology – Supports NY Chapter SUNY-ESF research".

Sincerely yours,
Allen Nichols, President, NY-TACF
(607) 263-5105
fajknichols.75@gmail.com



Jeff Zarnowski, new field and greenhouse manager for the American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project, is prepping the field for a new test plot.

Reward: \$200 for the Largest American Chestnut Tree Found in New York State

A \$200 reward plus a blight-tolerant seedling, pending approval, will be given to the person who finds the largest healthy American chestnut tree over 18" DBH not previously recorded by the New York Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation of New York (NY-TACF). A \$50 reward will be given for all trees found over 14" DBH. The tree must be found in New York State in 2019 and the property owner must allow NY-TACF access for pollination and/or seed collection. The tree must also be identified by NY-TACF as pure American chestnut.



What to look for: Open burs lying on the ground near the tree. The burs will be light brown in color with long sharp spines and measure approximately 3 inches across. The leaves are slender; 6 to 9 inches long with pinpointed teeth that have a fishhook profile. They are similar to a beach leaf, except longer and more pointed on each end.

For further information or identification of a tree contact President and District 4 director, Allen Nichols at (607) 263-5105 or by e-mail, fajknichols.75@gmail.com

Mark Your Calendars!

The annual NY-TACF meeting is scheduled for Oct. 26, 2019 in Tully, NY (just south of Syracuse).

We have 10 rooms reserved for the fall meeting at the Quality Inn in Tully, NY (<https://www.choicehotels.com/new-york/tully/quality-inn-hotels/ny710>).

These rooms will be held until 10/9/19. To reserve a room, call (315) 696-6061 and reference NY-TACF CHESTNUT to receive your discount.

Looking forward to a great meeting and feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Allen Nichols, NY-TACF President, (607) 263-5105



Annual Chapter Meeting in New Paltz, NY



Photo courtesy of Kristen Russell

- Over a Thousand Pure American Chestnuts Exchanged or Given Away.
- At age 100, Sherrett Chase was honored with the President's award.
- Gabriel Popkin, writer of a chestnut article in Science Magazine (<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/08/save-iconic-american-chestnut-researchers-plan-introduction-genetically-engineered-tree>), came to gather more info for a new article for NY Times Magazine.

It was another great meeting!

There were over fifty attendees at last fall's meeting held on October 6, 2019 at the Hampton by Hilton. The absences of Herb Darling was noted. This was the first meeting he has missed. Chuck Maynard was also not present. Members such as Emmett Hoops, Roy Hopke, Jim Donowick, and Rich Wells have stepped up to help out where there has been need. The meeting began with a brief welcome by Allen Nichols, *President of NY-TACF*. This was followed by district reports.

- Niko Nantsis, co-director of District 1, spent a large amount of time last fall collecting nuts on Long Island.
- Dale Travis reported that he grew 24 American chestnut seedlings. He also expressed delight for the enthusiasm NYC residents have about American chestnuts.
- Allen Nichols distributed over 7000 American chestnut trees to members. He also discussed using a smartphone app called TreeSnap to record wild American chestnut trees.
- Emmett Hoops has been working diligently to bring the American chestnut story to New York state schools. He also created a podcast called "The Village Chestnut Tree", which currently has 10 episodes.

- Roy Hopke discussed a new mapping program he uses call onX maps. It is good for chestnut explorers to use.
- Rich Wells reported for District 9. He's been a member of TACF since 1983. Although Herb and Jane Darling have some health issues, Herb helped water at the Zoar site this summer. In the fall, they harvested many nut and Herb cataloged them. The whole valley is 20 miles long and has deep gorges. The chestnut orchard, which is on state property, is approximately ten acres. Originally there were 21 different chestnut backgrounds, however, some have been lost to blight. Currently, there are roughly 15 different backgrounds. There is also a nursery at Zoar with trees from ESF. These trees are doing well.

John Dougherty, *Vice President for Science*, discussed the importance of writing a comment to the USDA in support of regulatory approval for transgenic chestnuts. They will want to know why you feel it is important to bring back the American chestnut. NY-TACF will let you know when it is time to comment.

Next, Science Reports were given by faculty, staff, and students from ESF. Linda McGuigan presented on small stem

inoculations done on transgenic and non-transgenic American chestnuts, as well as Chinese chestnuts. The tests revealed that transgenic American chestnuts have the highest tolerance to the blight fungus. Next, Hannah Pilkey discussed controlled pollinations using transgenic American chestnut pollen. Over 1700 nuts were collected, with more than 40% inheriting the Oxalate Oxidase transgene. Tyler Desmarais spoke about LED lights used to grow American chestnuts. Leaf surface area was greater under LEDs, however, rooting was not affected. Erik Carlson treated blighted trees with mud packs and saw 100% success when applied correctly. He also grafted transgenic American chestnut scions on non-transgenic rootstock and had success with different grafting methods.

After lunch, Bill Powell talked about the USDA petition submission. The petition, 188 pages long plus references and appendices, contains information on American chestnut, the blight, the transformation process, tests done with transgenic trees, and the rationale for release of these trees. The timeline includes a completeness review by regulators, a period by ESF to respond to the review, and a comments period. He also discussed the submissions to be sent to the FDA and EPA.

The final talk of the day was done by Sara Fitzsimmons, who discussed quantifying diversity of wild American chestnuts, tree identification, and TreeSnap.

The meeting concluded after a brief business meeting where three members, Paul Ackermen, Linda McGuigan, and Laurence Windhouser, were nominated and elected as NY-TACF directors.

The Long Road

Continued from page 1

Stan believed that through recent advances in biotechnology, a transgenic American chestnut tree could be blight-tolerant and have American characteristics without the Chinese genes. He was able to convince Herb and Jane of his scientific approach at their very first meeting. Stan presented his plan before TACF leaders and others with conviction and science authority. As our vice president for science, Stan educated our members (including this writer) about the science behind the transgenic project. He also worked closely with the ESF chestnut project directors. Stan served as our vice president for science until his death in 2012.

Arlene Wirsig

Arlene Wirsig was more responsible for building the New York State chapter than anyone else. Herb and Stan would be the first to tell you that. Arlene made sure that every detail was attended to efficiently and professionally. Her friendly manner often overcame difficulties. Was there a membership problem that she needed to discuss with the national TACF office? Arlene would solve it. She always made sure that every member felt welcome and important. Our annual membership meeting, held at different venues across the state required detailed coordination. Arlene's touch made meeting place requirements and hotel arrangements always wonderful. Arlene always arranged enjoyable activities for meeting participants to balance the chestnut work. Who could forget the boat ride on the St. Lawrence, the train ride with dinner, or the silent auction fund raisers? Faithfully working with Arlene were Jane Darling and Bethany Ruane. For more than 20 years, Arlene was our prime chapter builder.

ESF Science Excellence and Innovation

The story of the ESF American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project demonstrates science excellence, and innovation. Founded and directed by Dr. Charles Maynard (now emeritus) and Dr. William Powell (still directing the effort). They both became charter members of the NY-TACF State Chapter as soon as it was



Linda McGuigan shows John Gorden, John and Josie Ellis, Chuck Maynard (in background), and Herb Darling one of the first transgenic American chestnut trees in 2006. The cage seen around the chestnut protected it from critters that were getting into the greenhouse.

founded in 1990. They both provided the leadership and science direction to their research project to bring about its success. When the research began, there was no guarantee the project would succeed. No one had done anything like it.

A team of dedicated visiting scientists, technicians, graduate and undergraduate students developed genetic engineering techniques to insert the Oxalate Oxidase (OxO) gene from wheat (also found in banana, apricot, strawberry, potato, corn, tomato, and other foods) into American chestnuts to yield fungus tolerant trees. This gene, which produces an enzyme that detoxifies the acid produced by the fungus, was added to the 40,000 genes of the American chestnut genome. The fatal acid that once would have killed the tree, is chemically broken down by the OxO enzyme into carbon dioxide and hydrogen peroxide, two compounds that are beneficial to the tree. The OxO gene has no "cidal" or killing activity. It does not kill the blight fungus, just takes away its weapon. The fungus can still live on our trees as a saprophyte (living off dead tissue), just as it does on Chinese chestnut, maple, and many oak species. Scientists sometimes distinguish "tolerance" from "resistance" in plant health. Tolerance reflects the host's capacity to maintain fitness (to survive and reproduce), despite being infected or infested, through mechanisms such as the production of

detoxifying compounds. Since this is exactly the case with our transgenic Darling 58 line of American chestnut, these trees are rightfully termed blight-tolerant. You can describe our transgenic American chestnut as blight-tolerant, and you can describe it as blight-resistant. Back in 2015, when the success of the transgenic tree was first announced, one longtime chapter member excitedly exclaimed to me, "It's like a miracle!" Much of what mankind accomplishes through science does seem like a miracle.

Thanks to the extensive and difficult pioneering research and innovation at ESF, the Darling 58 line of transgenic trees have 100% of the genetic makeup of pure, wild-type American chestnuts, with the addition of the OxO gene from wheat. It also has proven to have more blight tolerance than the Chinese chestnut. This transgenic approach alters the tree's DNA in a more exact way than traditional breeding and will produce higher numbers of blight-resistant trees faster. Along the way, this pioneering research advanced scientific knowledge.

In Part 3, learn what ESF's American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project achieved. What were the sticking points and the breakthroughs? How did our chapter support the effort? Who were the prime movers at ESF? Who were the collaborators? What lies ahead?

The American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project



Allison Oakes

I am currently a postdoctoral Orentreich Research Fellow beginning work on the American elm project using similar techniques and methods as were used to develop a blight-tolerant chestnut tree.

I am also continuing work pioneered by Dr. Christie Lovat at McGill University on producing new somatic embryo lines from tissue cultured shoot tips. Initial results showed that at least one line, an American chestnut tree from southern Ontario, was able to produce globular embryos on the new medium treatment (see photo below). I am repeating the successful experiment with more genotypes from all over the eastern United States.

Furthermore, I am inducing six new American chestnut genotypes into tissue culture from Maine trees, donated by Dr. Thomas Klak of the University of New England, as well as ten full-sibling pairs of seedlings (five that are positive and five that are negative for the OxO gene), which were bred with different mother trees. These are grandchildren of the original Darling 58 tree.



American chestnut shoot tips producing globular embryos.



Kristen Stewart

I am currently part of the American Chestnut Research Project at SUNY-ESF as a Research Analyst. My involvement with the project includes both lab and fieldwork, as well as being an advocate for the survival of the American Chestnut tree. I have presented at various conferences and represented our team as a guest speaker in Australia in June 2016. Recently, I've given a presentation at the Citrus County (Florida) Chapter of the Native Plant Society on Tuesday, March 5, 2019 where approx. Sixty members and guests attended.

I have also been actively involved with Relay For Life of Madison County, which similarly to the American chestnuts, are showing that you can survive a disease. On Saturday, June 1st from noon to 11 pm in Oneida, NY, we will be giving out Wild Type American Chestnut trees to all survivors....the last time we gave out over 100 trees!! Our Team is "Researching For Survivors".

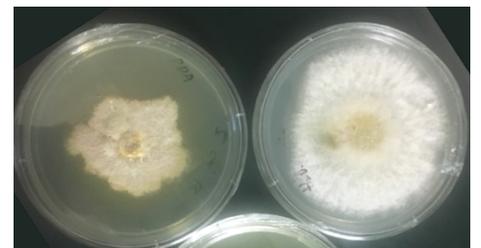


Nancy Stratton and Bruce Stewart with an American chestnut tree at the Relay For Life of Madison County in 2016.



Xueqing (Shellie) Xiong

My research project focuses on American chestnut trees transformed with the stilbene synthase gene obtained from grape plants. Stilbene synthase produces resveratrol, which helps grape plants defend against fungal diseases found in natural environments. My project concentrates on how resveratrol and its byproducts may help chestnut trees fight against destructive diseases such as chestnut blight and Phytophthora. By understanding the mechanism and anti-fungal performance of resveratrol, pterostilbene, and other existing derivatives, it is hoped we can enhance both blight and Phytophthora resistance in American chestnut.



Blight disease inoculated with resveratrol (left) and control (right), the present of resveratrol slowed down mycelial growth.

For more information about the American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project, visit:
<http://www.esf.edu/chestnut/>

or join our Facebook group:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/esfchestnut/?ref=bookmarks>



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 Visit www.acf.org, call 828-281-0047, or mail the form (below) to:

The American Chestnut Foundation Inc.
 50 North Merrimon Avenue, Suite 115, Asheville, NC 28804

Enclosed please find my \$40 membership in support of NY-TACF.
 I also make an additional gift of \$ _____ to the New York State Chapter.
 A total of \$ _____ is enclosed.

All memberships to TACF include TACF publications, a car decal, membership to one of the state chapters as well as opportunities to participate in local chestnut activities. Visit www.acf.org or call (828) 281-0047 for more information.

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Please make check payable to The American Chestnut Foundation

Name on card: _____ Card #: _____

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NY Chapter membership includes the Newsletter *The Bur*. The NY Chapter helps guide research at SUNY-ESF and maintains plantings to keep the American Chestnut gene pool. TACF & NY-TACF are 501 (c) (3) non-profit organizations. Except for the membership services portion of your contribution (valued at \$15) your gift is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.