



# *Dahlia Society of California Newsletter*



**NEXT MEETING:** Tuesday, November 11 at 7:30 PM at the Hall of Flowers. Parking is available at 10th and Lincoln.

**Program:** Lou Paradise will demonstrate his 2-shovel extrication process and discuss dividing. No matter how many times Lou gives this demonstration, we



always take away something new from it. Members are invited to try their hand at separating a few of his tubers. Lou explains all the steps and some of the problems of overwintering dahlia tubers. Who will share treats before Thanksgiving??

**BURSTING WITH BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS** Tim strolled in with an armful of glorious pink waterlilies



including Ruthie G and a few seedlings. Despite the rain, Sisterhood Gardens still pumps out show-quality examples of fragile waterlilies, although Miss Delilah is responding to the flagging light hours by popping center immediately upon opening; this is NOT evidence of poor genetics. Tim also had a huge vase full of seed heads. He recommends putting up a few golf umbrellas over prime seed producers in the event of rain, so the seed heads don't fill up with moisture and rot instead of mature and form plump viable seeds—or dahlia lottery tickets, as some hybridizers call them. Tim also



urges everyone to thoroughly tag all your plants while you can still see blooms.



**ROUTE 66** Alex shared the highlights of their road trip to the National Show in Chicago including standing under the The Gateway Golden Arch in St. Louis. Allison walked us through the beautiful botanical gardens, Steve Meggo's private garden, and introduced some of the many bloomerrati like Dick Parshall of Clearview Dahlias. Mass displays of 20 or more blooms stunned them. Both Alex and Allison were surprised that Novices were defined as those



growing fewer than 30 dahlias rather than by their cultivation experience.

### TRANSPORTING DAHLIAS

Anita took us through her process of choosing what to enter in the National Show: whatever looked good on Thursday before her Friday morning flight! As much as she hoped to pick balls and formal decorative, her only viable options were Elvira, Holly Huston, Blomquist Jean and Bumble Rumble. She relied on the kindness of flight attendants who sequestered her beauties in first class whilst she rode far behind them in coach. More kind dahlianeers helped her figure out the exhibit cards and placement. “So many Elviras!” she exclaimed





upon seeing dozens pink peony entries. Lo and behold, her Holly Huston earned her a National Ribbon! Well done, Anita! Click here to see her presentation: [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1dL6j23yuV_oFlwnUB2d7ywnWaXqVPtzlIBeudkT_nsE/edit?usp=sharing)

[1dL6j23yuV\\_oFlwnUB2d7ywnWaXqVPtzlIBeudkT\\_nsE/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1dL6j23yuV_oFlwnUB2d7ywnWaXqVPtzlIBeudkT_nsE/edit?usp=sharing)

**WORDS FROM OUR PRESIDENT** Wearing a chic apron covered with bright red dahlias, Erik explained that Jane Foster designs fabrics with floral motifs which can be purchased from her website: <https://janefosterdesign.com/index.html> just in case someone is thinking ahead to the holidays; blazing red dahlias instead of poinsettias! Ho ho ho. Erik outlined some of the fun ideas on the table for the 100th anniversary of the Dahlia being named our San Francisco's official





flower. Do you have some good ideas to promote this awesome milestone? Please let us know.

**MS HOSPITALITY** Jenna shared pictures of the myriad bouquets she, Debbie, Brigid and Sarah assembled for the two weeks of Flower Piano and shared how she pinned boutonnieres on Mayor Lurie and his wife. “He hugged me and likes dahlias now!” With a few leftover blooms, Jenna made little posies and dropped them off on bus benches, park walls, and playground tables. She has been having such fun

receiving responses from the people who serendipitously find these lovely bouquets. Let’s all make New Year’s resolutions to try this when our next season of dahlias begins blooming. Everyone wins.

### **SWEETS FOR US**

**SWEETHEARTS** Thank you to Ken and Kathy for driving all the way from Lodi and bringing us delectable donut holes. Brigid’s cupcakes disappeared along with Anita’s chocolate mint cookies! Consumed so fast! Alex and Allison’s peanut butter cookies proved crunchy and irresistible. Thank you to



everyone who contributed to making our community a little more cohesive and happy.

**DAHLIA AMBASSADOR** Tara carried inspirational ideas about dahlias to the St. Francis Woods Garden Club. She outlined the different forms and sizes, answered questions about growing conditions, and brought beautiful dahlias to inspire future growers. Well done, Tara!

**BIRTHDAY GARDEN PARTY** Combining garden tour and Deborah's natal anniversary, Sarah proved there are always reasons to celebrate! In her backyard, Eden Alices pumped out perfect white balls. While other dahlias leaned into Autumn, her two apple trees bent under green bounty.



**DAHLIA MATH** Marissa sent in a story from Lennie Larkin who observed what various growers do to stave off the ravages of frost for a few more days. Some throw sheets over their plants, others erect cardboard shelters. But she was astounded at Gretel and Steve at Sunny Meadows Farm, and Grace at Five Forks Farm who hired helicopter crews to buzz around their dahlia fields all night, trying to keep the plants from freezing! She writes, “Not to nerd out too hard, but I can’t help but wonder about the cost-benefit analysis these bad ass farmers penciled out.” 10,000 dahlia plants, yielding at least 1 stem a week which could be sold for \$2 a stem. That’s \$20,000 if helicopters can keep their patch going just one more week. Wow! Deborah and Lou remember one morning years ago when low temperatures turned all their healthy green dahlias deadly ghastly black overnight. Fortunately death-by-frost rarely attacks us here in the Bay Area.

### **KUDOS TO SISTERHOOD GARDENS!**

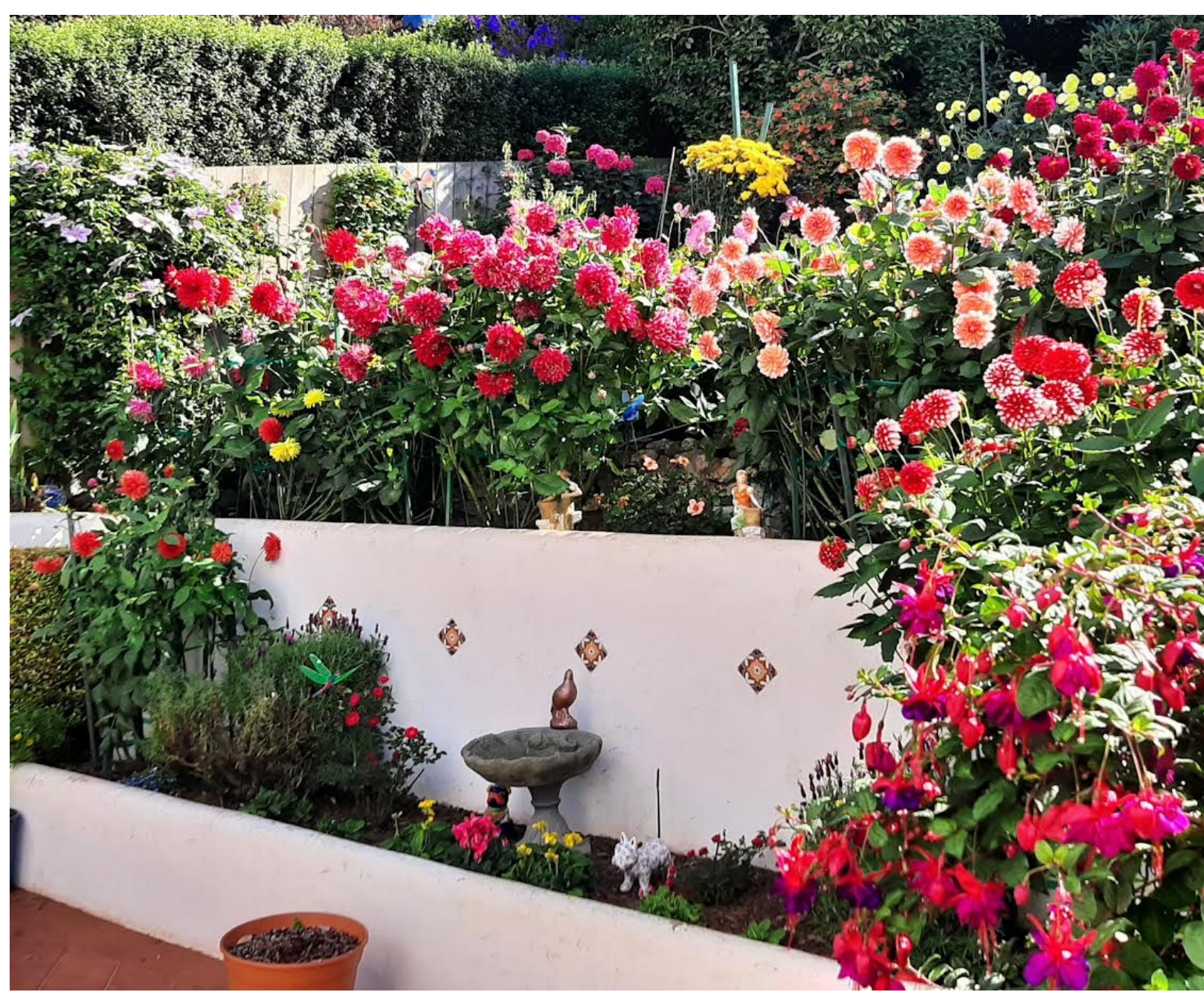
The SF Chronicle recently printed an article about the 11 Best Stops on the new 38-mile Roundabout



Trail in San Francisco. Hartlaub cites Sisterhood Gardens as a “surprise dahlia garden rivaling the famed Golden Gate Park Dahlia Dell.” This trail is broken into 6 segments of 6-7 miles each. Try one soon.

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2025/roundabout-sf-perimeter-trail-hike/>

**LUCY'S LATE SPLENDOR** The brilliant October sun tipped Lucy's terraced tiers from splendid to spectacular. Against a Niagara of magnificent fuchsias cascading 14+ feet, Lucy's Clearview Magic blazed away. AC Rooster crowed in the face of dainty Fuzzy Wuzzy. Prometheus pushed over 7 feet tall covered with blooms.



When asked how her roses have such perfect almost plastic-looking leaves, she wickedly smiled, “ I spent all night gluing them on for you.”

## 2026 ALREADY?



A Year in Dahlias – 2026, a beautiful 11 x 17 inch dahlia wall calendar by Tina McNabb and Alan Fisher features 19 beautiful high gloss images of dahlias on strong, high gloss paper. The 2026 calendar is the finest that either has yet produced. To preview the calendars, use this link:

[https://portal.printingcenterusa.com/flipbook\\_share.php?code=962862](https://portal.printingcenterusa.com/flipbook_share.php?code=962862) Prices start at \$14 but there are discounts for buying more. Maybe someone could organize a group buy???

**DELL TOURS** Inspired by Erik and Deborah's Walk n Talks back in early September, Antoinette volunteered to give two Facts n Fun strolls each



Saturday until all the flowers die down. Basically drinking from a fire hose of dahlia sources, autodidact Antoinette revised her ambulatory conversations each week. She used the Swan Island catalog to practice her form recognition, Sarah's Show Bible to access handy facts and the dahliadell.org website to bone up on terms and the monthly Growing Guide to give visitors a heads up about changes to come with the darkening seasons. Thank you, Antoinette!

## BEAUTIFULLY BRANCHING OUT



Ken and Layla met taking classes from City College's Horticultural department. Ken shared her experiences volunteering at the Dell and entering arrangements in our Floribunda! Soon Layla was weeding in the teardrop, too. Ken's unique arrangements captured the attention of designers at the

De Young, who invited Ken to concoct something for the museum. Given the season, Ken brought the spirit of an autumn forest inside, with leaves, mums and yes, a couple of dahlias!

## **OVER HILL AND DELL**

**Sarah, Erik, Tim and Mini cut way back on water on the hill and let their clumps slide naturally into dormancy. Sue still has a few blooms, but decided November means stop watering, too. Now they all**



**hope for a bountiful tuber harvest. In the tear drop, Lou has already begun cutting a few down and pulling a few out. Tinnee and Jerry still have some magnificent flowers from their late bloomers like Nick Senior. Their Skip to My Lou just keeps pumping out jaunty red and white charmers. Thanks to**

wonderful volunteers and a



gorgeously warm October, Deborah's section surprises with unprecedented flowers—so many blooms that up to six volunteers a day were able to take home bouquets. Antoinette, Jennifer and Layla learned about making late season cuttings. Last weekend, Jennifer was asked if



“the 11:30 tour would take place?” since the rain showers kept Antoinette in the East Bay. Deborah invited Jennifer to conduct her own Walk n Talk, which was received quite enthusiastically. Thank you, Jennifer! Steve entertained volunteer Carol's visiting parents. Parents, room mates, siblings, and professional friends of our volunteers have suddenly “discovered” the Dell! So fun.



## NOTABLE NOVEMBER

**Deadhead, Disbud and AGGRESSIVELY Cut Back to New Growth** Our gorgeous October granted one more month of really fine looking dahlias. My local library and senior center



appreciated color to combine with their pumpkins. Whenever I disbud this time of year at this time of year, I calculate when in November even more dahlias should bloom. Great anticipation! Some of my branches are turning brown. I cut these back to new growth OR down to 4-5 notches above ground. These joints act as water seals for the heavy morning dew or the rain we should be getting soon. Some people even wrap tin foil around the exposed cuts to make double sure no moisture leaks down into the crown where the tubers are maturing. If the crown starts to rot, you could

loose the whole clump of tubers. One really wet November, Lou rubber banded plastic bags over all his clumps.

**Seed Heads** Watch one of your blooms unfurl; let it naturally loose its petals one by one. What is left is a green seed head. If we have dry nights, these can mature



naturally on their stems. But if we get more rain, you might try cutting some of these seed heads and taking them home. I put my greenest genetic receptacles in a jar of water in a sunny window. Every couple days I snip 1/4" off the bottom of the stem to keep water and nutrients climbing up the capillaries, allowing the seeds to continue maturing. When everything turns brown, you can hang them upside down to dry them out a little more. These can hold from zero to over 50 seeds. At some point, separate the chaff from the seeds. Diligent hybridizers keep track of at least the mother plant.

**Water and Fertilizer** Watch your dahlias. They will tell you when they need more to drink. As long as they are turgid and proud as ballerinas, they do not need water. If you see a little droop, by all means give them a swallow. Old wives recommend no fertilizer after October 1. They posit that

fertilizer encourages the tubers to continue growing rather than toughing up their skins in anticipation of protecting the plant through winter.



**Cocktail du Jour** I have stopped spraying entirely, but I am still pulling off ugly brown leaves and weeding. Every weed you nab now, forfends against hundreds later on.

**Late Season Cuttings** Have you noticed wee green sprigs erupting from your lower stalks? Your clump senses the last opportunity to try to make seeds by starting these new little stems. When these tiny protrusions have 3-4 sets of leaves, I carefully tug them off the main plant and pop them

into 1x1x3" starting pots and put them in my greenhouse to develop roots. Why go to all this trouble? Generally a given dahlia might produce 0-10 tubers a year. Often those 0 tuber-givers prove so wonderful we hate to loose them. Grrrr. For example, Rolf, Belle of the Ball, Porcelain and Jessica make crappy tubers if any at all.



However, they do root fairly easily in the greenhouse. So I try to make as many cuttings this time of year to cosset in the greenhouse all winter to assure that I will have a couple to plant in the spring as well as a couple to trade for other new, cool varieties. Try it.

I am still roguing— pulling out



poor performers. Here is Steve preparing to destroy a Bad Rooster. Why bad? Such good color, such a



vigorous plant, but ALL the blooms this year have begun with open centers and gotten worse. Sigh. On the other hand, here it is November and Mingus Toni still delights.





**Humongous Pennhill Watermelons delight visitors. How did that variety get so close to the Petting Zoo fence? I think that in the dark of night, he pulled up his roots and scooted closer to his adoring fans. I certainly didn't**

**plant the galoot where he could bully all my delicate open centers! Kenora Macop B pumps out malevolent dark**

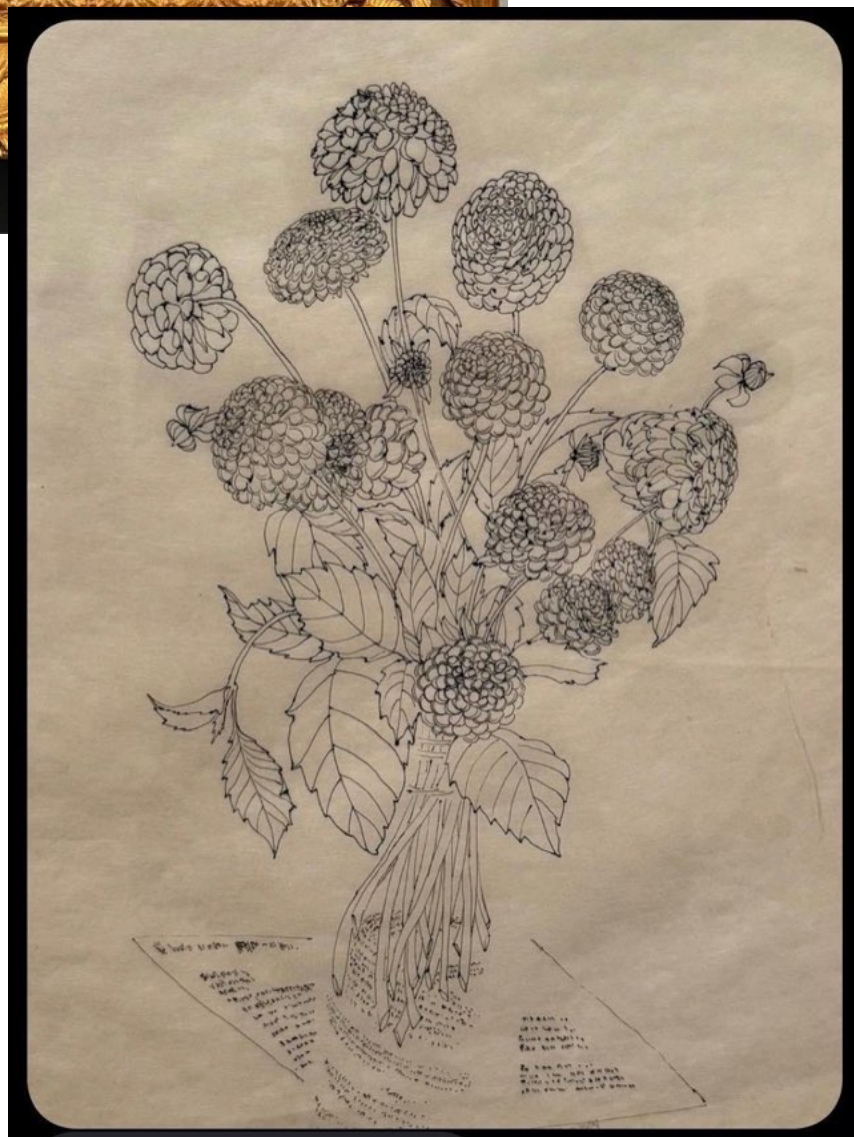




blooms fine enough to show. Hollyhill Day Dream continues to stun: floriferous, fabulous smoochy orange, rain defiant. Lakeview Glow, the ultimate

dahlia-with-training-wheels because it grows under ANY circumstances, could trot off with ribbons despite the rain. Just perfect in NOVEMBER!!! Amazing.

Thank you to our members who submitted this oil painting from Berthe Morisot and the Ruth Azawa sketch of gifted dahlias.



Yours in dirt,  
Deborah



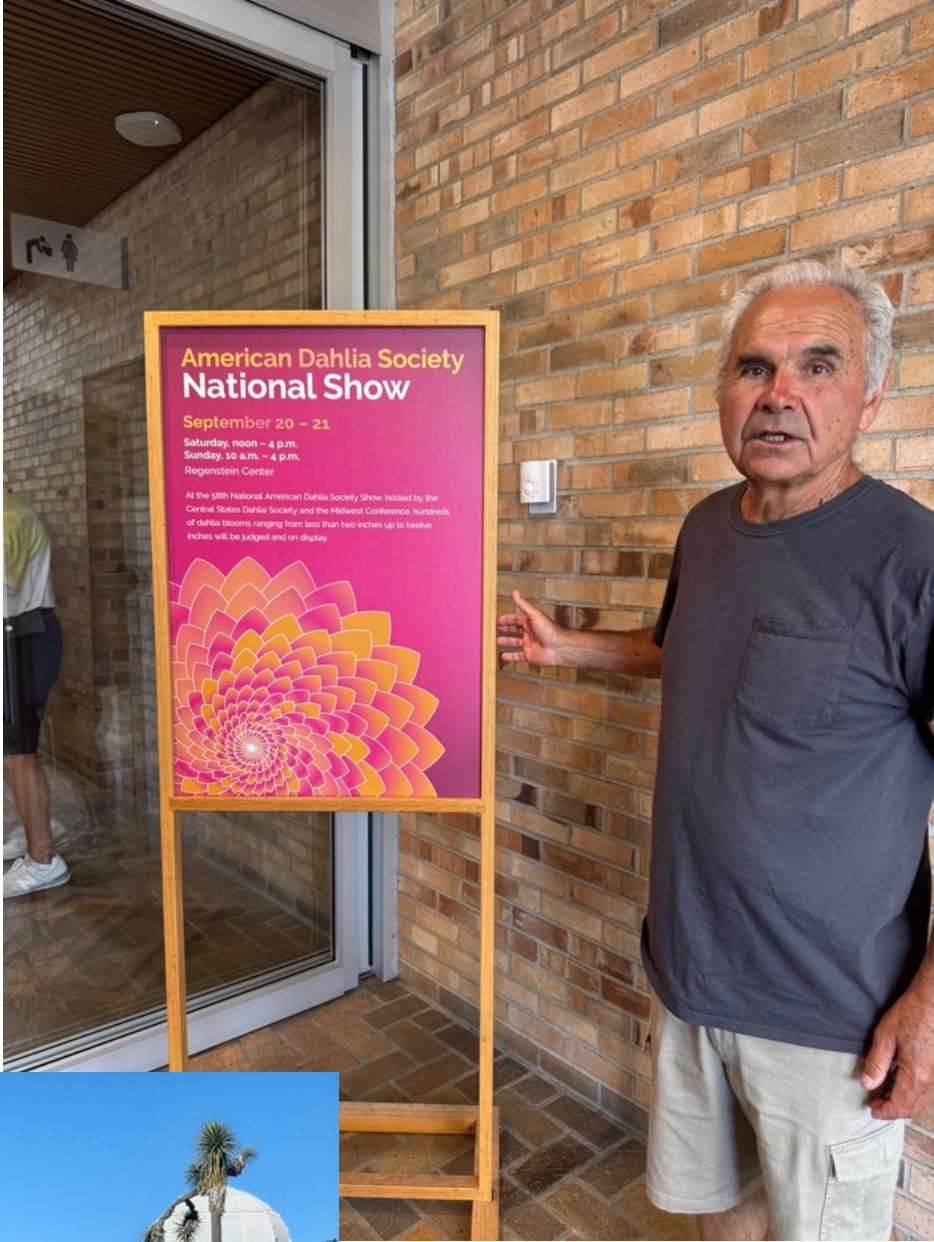
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