In 2014, the Northeast Region (NER) of the American Conifer Society will hold its annual regional meeting on September 19-21 at the Holiday Inn, Rochester, NY. This article is the first of a series the NER will be submitting on the 2014 venues to the website. Each gardener has been asked to write an article about his or her garden and explore in much more detail the botanical and landscape delights awaiting your visit. The author has estimated that these venues will offer the opportunity to observe over 600 conifer cultivars, including dozens of unusual Ginkgo.

The NER of the American Conifer Society visited Rochester, New York, in 2004, and people are still talking about it. Ten years later, Rochester again
A nice vignette of one of Jerry’s many rock gardens. *Photo by Karen Kral*

A vista of the Kral’s front yard and house. *Photo by Karen Kral*
welcomes the NER to our beautiful city. And, once again, Elmer Dustman and Jerry Kral have teamed up to plan and organize the meeting so that attendees can expect the best in food, accommodations, garden venues and buying opportunities.

Rochester boasts the name “Flower City” for good reason. Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of Central Park in NYC, designed 4 parks for Monroe County and Rochester; Genesee Valley Park, Highland Park, Seneca Park and Maplewood Park. The internationally famous Lilac Festival showcases a world-class lilac collection in Highland Park during May. The Maplewood Rose Gardens hold a mid-June rose festival. At the turn of the 19th century, Rochester was the world’s largest importer and distributor of plants from Europe.

We will visit Highland Park’s Pinetum. This is an old pinetum featuring over 300 species and varieties of conifers. Dozens of these conifers are well over a hundred years old. See what a 90 year-old mugo pine (spp.) looks like. Olmsted was entranced by the rolling topography left by glacial outwash and by how much it resembled many Alpine regions in Europe. Olmsted purposely designed Highland to look like a sub-alpine ecosystem. Certain vantage points totally remove views of the urban surroundings, and, for a moment, you can imagine you are in some picturesque Alpine valley.

Jerry and Karen Kral will once again welcome the ACS to their gardens. The gardens are now 22 years old. See how Jerry has handled the 10-year horizon twice over. Adjoining land acquisitions have expanded the gardens to almost an acre (41,000 Sq. Ft.) within the city of Rochester. Unique statuary, sitting areas and over a half mile of stone path take you into a botanical world of whimsy, fantasy and rare plants. Jerry’s emphasis is always on the aesthetic. Conifers are displayed within complex vignettes of plants and hardscapes. Over 300 conifer and Ginkgo cultivars blend with hundreds of annuals, perennials, shrubs and rare deciduous trees.

Brooke Henninger’s garden proves that you don’t need a lot of space to grow conifers and to present them in an attractive way. The 10,000 sq. ft. gardens combine hardscape and water features to showcase the more than 150 conifers...
Brooke has collected. A Hinoki (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*) hedge, planted and lovingly pruned by her aunt, inspired Brooke’s fondness for conifers. Brooke admits to having a serious case of Addicted Conifer Syndrome and is eager to share her passion for conifers with the rest of us.

Mert Bohonos’s garden is unique in that his passion is bonsai. A

A vista of Brooke’s front yard.
*Photo by Elmer Dustman*

*Picea glauca* ‘Pendula’ at attention in Brooke’s backyard.
*Photo by Elmer Dustman*
20-year student of William Valavanis (editor of the quarterly *International BONSAI* and home for the International Bonsai Arboretum), Bohonos has translated bonsai technique into his landscape. See how basic bonsai techniques can be used to enhance even a mundane conifer (or any tree) and turn it into a unique specimen. The beds are beautifully maintained and feature many unusual conifer specimens. A large display bench features an extensive collection of Bohonos’s bonsai creations.

We will visit and have lunch at the estate of David and Bonnie Swinford.
The Swinford house with a vista of the grand terrace. *Photo by Elmer Dustman*

A close-up of the base of the grand terrace. *Photo by Elmer Dustman*
The house, an Italian Renaissance mansion, was a prohibition-era, roaring 20’s edifice designed for entertaining. It features a secret wine vault, indoor pool and a large terrace overlooking the grounds. In 1941, Fletcher Steele designed and built long walls and an intimate garden to one side of the house. They bought the property in 2001, but, due to extensive work on the house, only began work on the gardens in 2008. David thinks small and big at the same time and has 3 acres to work with. Most conifers are of specimen quality, including the artfully displayed miniatures. Enjoy a superb lunch under a tent, and let the views of the grounds and house transport you back to an earlier, grander age.