A Gift of Beauty.

ROTARY BOTANICAL GARDENS

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024
Thank you!

A Year in Review

There’s so much beauty in the Gardens. And not just plantings, colors, or scents. There’s beauty in our guests, volunteers, donors, staff, and event sponsors; and none of our work would be possible without any of them. Our 2023-2024 year marked notable achievements and growth, emphasizing our mission to Enrich Lives Through Natural Beauty, Education, and the Arts.

Our Friends of the Garden Membership Program flourished, with 1,055 member households, and the introduction of the Matching Gift Program bolstered donor support. The Gardens maintained a strong commitment to sustainability and innovation, building on our multi-year perennial movement and reviving our plant-labeling program.

Our educational programs for both adults and youth saw increased participation, highlighting the community’s enthusiastic embrace of our mission. Memorable events, such as the Sunday Classics Music Series and the record-breaking Holiday Light Show, added cultural value and contributed greatly to our financial sustainability. Additionally, our fundraising initiatives for the restoration of the Garden Pathways and Japanese Arch Bridge were bolstered with generous support.

Setting ourselves on a plan for long-term success, we implemented a comprehensive strategic plan to strengthen our organization and help us reach new heights.

Thank you to every individual supporter, corporate sponsor, foundation, community partner, dedicated member, every hardworking staff member and volunteer. Your support has been instrumental in achieving our goals and sustaining the beauty and educational mission of Rotary Botanical Gardens.

We are proud to share our award-winning collection with you and look forward to continuing to establish our community Gardens as not only an authority in horticultural knowledge on both local and national levels, but as a beautiful place to create peaceful memories for all.

Randy Hughes, Interim Director

Friends of the Gardens Membership Program

In 2023, our Friends of the Garden Membership Program thrived with 1,055 member households. The preferred choice was the Friend Family Membership. Members enjoyed year-round garden access, reciprocal entry to over 345 gardens and arboreta across North America, discounted rates on events and programs, a 10% discount at the Cottage Garden Gallery Gift Shop and our bi-annual plant sales, complimentary access to the monthly Summer Music Series ‘Sunday Classics,’ and a special invitation to the Holiday Light Show Premier Night.

New Matching Gifts Program

This year we introduced an exciting initiative to boost donor contributions and support our mission. We proudly launched a Matching Gift Program, providing a unique opportunity for donors and volunteers to amplify the impact of their contributions. Through this program, every donation made had the potential to be matched by employers, doubling, and sometimes tripling, the overall support for our gardens and enabling us to enhance our programs and services.
Thank You, Volunteers!

We celebrate the invaluable contributions of our dedicated volunteers—true champions of Rotary Botanical Gardens. With a group of 115 strong, these passionate individuals generously shared their time and expertise, collectively logging an impressive 12,511 hours. From tending to garden areas to providing clerical and educational support, each volunteer played a vital role in shaping the welcoming and beautiful environment that defines our Gardens. This year, their commitment added a special touch to our community, making a lasting impact on all who visited. As we reflect on 2023, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our incredible volunteers, the heartbeat of Rotary Botanical Gardens.

Dahlia Display
Painting the garden with vivid color, the highly anticipated 13-Bed Dahlia Display showcased 60 varieties of vibrant colors, varied forms, and sizes—from delicate to monumental. These Mexican natives were impressive. We loved witnessing this kaleidoscope of nature’s artistry firsthand with you.

Cutting Garden
Adjacent to our Wellness Garden, a new garden featured over a thousand Iceland poppies in late May and then in the summer transitioned to plants that have traditionally been grown for floral arrangements; tall zinnias, cosmos, verbena, celosia, gaura and many more vibrant flower varieties.

Cherry Blossom Walk
Similar to the Japanese Flowering Cherry trees that Japan gifted the U.S. to form a grove of cherry trees in Washington, D.C., these trees erupted in a cloud of pink flowers in May.
Enhancements Near the Koi Pond
At the koi pond, we underwent a transformative project by replacing over 100' of deer damaged arborvitae hedge with a mix of vibrant green and purple European beech (Fagus sylvatica and Fagus sylvatica ‘Purpurea’). This new hedge not only adds a splash of contrasting colors throughout the year but also forms a living archway leading to the children's garden. In the process, we bid farewell to an old utility shed, making way for a mixed shrub border featuring Myrica pensylvanica and Cornus sericea ‘Budd’s Yellow.’

Enchanting Additions to the English Garden
The heart of our English garden now boasts a charming knot garden, featuring a delightful combination of dark green ‘Glencoe’ boxwood and lively chartreuse ‘Goldmound’ Spirea. This low hedge or parterre will host a rotation of colorful seasonal plants, creating a warm welcome for our visitors. The addition of a dark purple foliage hedge is on our radar for 2024.

Alpine Garden's Unique Hypertufa Planters
In the Alpine Garden, we introduced Hypertufa planters crafted with a mix of Portland cement, coconut coir, perlite, and vermiculite. These porous containers cater to the needs of plants requiring lean, well-draining soils. Thanks to these planters, we now showcase a unique plant palette, featuring yucca, ice plant, cacti, and Orostachys.

Artistic Screens and Whimsical Elements
To divert attention from necessary utility boxes, we installed decorative screens with botanical motifs, adding a touch of artistry to the garden. Whimsy found its place in the children's garden with the addition of a large gazing ball.

Japanese Garden Transformation
Our Japanese garden underwent significant progress with volunteers power-washing the fence, revealing the beautiful cedar wood beneath. We’re in the process of showcasing this natural beauty with a transparent stain or a traditional Japanese treatment. Additionally, a bamboo fountain standpipe and basin now grace the shore side near the arch bridge, introducing tranquility to the area.

Comfort Station Grand Addition
The standout addition of 2023 is our Comfort Station, strategically built into the hill near the Gazebo. Beyond providing much-needed amenities, it offers a stunning panoramic view from the top. Landscaping around the station includes Quercus ellipsoidalis, Aesculus parviflora ‘Rogers’, and Carex pensylvanica, with plans to finalize the installation with Phlox divaricata, Mertensia virginica, and Dirvilla Ionicerca ‘Jewel’ in spring.

Revived Labeling Program
This year, RBG underwent a significant plant identification upgrade. The garden's laser engraver, in disrepair for years, came back to life. We transitioned from plastic to anodized aluminum labels, and invested in a metal shear for cost-effective, in-house production. These durable labels, with discreet black rivets, will not only withstand the elements but also offer a sleek look. As we roll out these labels this spring, we mark the first step in a broader journey. Our future plans include using a GPS program to digitally map our plant collection, memorial features, and more, making valuable information accessible to our visitors.

Elevating Our Gardens: A Dual Fundraising Focus
In 2023, we embarked on two crucial campaigns to ensure safety and enrich our visitor experience. Our ongoing “Garden Pathways Restoration” project centers safer, accessible paths, while simultaneously, our “Japanese Arch Bridge” restoration campaign seeks to revive this cherished garden feature. Your support is crucial to revitalizing both pathways and the bridge, preserving the beauty and accessibility of our beloved Gardens.

Elegant Lawn Striper Touch
In select event gardens, such as the Sunken garden, we introduced a lawn striper to add a touch of elegance with distinct patterns in the turf, mirroring the sophistication seen in professional parks and stadiums.
What’s in Bloom Tours
Michael Jesiolowski, Horticulture Director, led over 120 participants through the Gardens for monthly behind the scenes tours every 3rd Thursday April-September. Michael provided insight on current blooms and answered gardening related questions. Participation exceeded all previous years, with most sessions filling up quickly, showing us there is appetite to expand our behind-the-scenes tour offerings.

General Tours
Tours of the gardens were organized by RBG’s event manager and educational coordinator, with dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers leading the way. Despite challenges like extreme heat and poor air quality due to wildfire, we successfully hosted 34 tour groups. Participants enjoyed narratives on the Gardens’ history, diverse plant life, and notable points of interest during up to two hours of leisurely walking.

Inaugural Super Seed Swap Saturday
Gardening enthusiasts gathered to exchange seeds, fostering community connections and expanding their collections. Attendees not only traded seeds but also shared houseplants seeking new homes. Rotary Botanical Gardens generously contributed various vegetable and flower seeds, adding to the diversity. The event concluded with a presentation by Director of Horticulture, Michael Jesiolowski, offering insights into recent garden developments and exciting plans for the upcoming growing season.

Milkweed: Mother Nature’s Smorgasbord
Led by educator Ann Pedder Reilly, participants delved into the fascinating world of milkweed and its vital role in our ecosystem. The presentation highlighted the diverse insects that thrive on milkweed, particularly exploring its connection with Monarch butterflies. Following, Ann led a garden walk, showcasing various milkweed types, their insect visitors, and offering insights on incorporating them into garden settings.

Garden Movement Classes
The Outdoor Garden Movement Classes offered a revitalizing yoga experience set against the scenic backdrop of the gardens. Participants immersed themselves in a serene environment, harmonizing mind, body, and soul. This series, featuring classes like Hatha Morning Yoga, Slow Vinyasa, and Flow Yoga, provided diverse approaches to mindful movement throughout the summer months. Priced at $3 for RBG members and $8 for non-members per class, these sessions were designed to be inclusive, ensuring accessibility for all participants. The program in partnership with local yoga studios/owners promoted health and well being in the natural oasis of the gardens.

Gardens in Miniature: Succulent Garden Workshop
Our Education Coordinator led a successful succulent workshop, where participants creatively selected succulents, stones, and accessories, receiving expert tips for thriving gardens. Attendees left with unique miniature succulent creations, showcasing their creativity and newfound gardening skills, along with the knowledge to properly care for succulents.

Learn to Make Kombucha
Promoting sustainability and self-sufficiency, The Booch Witch joined us in April, with a sold-out program on DIY kombucha! We got a ton of positive feedback and we thoroughly enjoyed the information and instruction this class, and Katie Kuznasic, offered our community.

Exploring the Labyrinth
Participants learned the ancient art of labyrinth meditation, guided by workshop leader, Suzelle Lynch. The session unfolded with insights into labyrinth history, drawing simple labyrinths, and a tranquil walk through the Rotary Gardens labyrinth in honor of World Labyrinth Day. Suzelle, a Janesville resident and certified labyrinth facilitator, shared her 20 years of expertise, providing attendees with valuable knowledge on the benefits of labyrinth use and tips on discovering local labyrinths for future exploration.

Holiday Wreath Workshop
Our Education Coordinator led a holiday wreath workshop this November, and the finished wreaths speak for themselves. Participants picked from a variety of choice live greens and accents and built their wreath from scratch.

Paint Pouring Workshops
This intimate event series, led by Nancy McKinnon, brought together enthusiastic participants who explored the unpredictable yet exciting process of acrylic pouring. The four workshops featured pouring sessions on various surfaces, including wooden hearts, circles, bowls, and holiday ornaments. The events were a resounding success, with all sessions sold out well in advance. Nancy’s dynamic approach to acrylic pouring, where spontaneity and fun reign supreme, made them one of the most enjoyable workshops held during our ‘off’ season.

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Spring Plant Program
Our spring field trip opportunity for local schools was a tremendous success, with five schools and a total of 210 enthusiastic 1st and 2nd graders participating in six engaging programs. Coordinated by our Education Coordinator and led by dedicated volunteers, the Plant Program began indoors with discussions on plant anatomy, life cycles, and growth requirements. Students tasted different plant parts, learned about their nutritional value, and explored products made from plants. The internationally themed garden tour included stops at the English Cottage Garden, Italian formal gardens, and Japanese garden. The highlight was the interactive finale in the Children’s Garden, where students embodied the plant life cycle. From seed to blooming flower, the kids enthusiastically participated in a hands-on activity, with volunteers and chaperones creating a memorable and educational experience.

Fall Pumpkin Program
This fall field trip opportunity for 3rd and 4th graders welcomed five schools and a total of 214 students to six engaging programs. Coordinated by our Education Coordinator and led by volunteers, the Pumpkin Program featured indoor discussions on pumpkin history, uses, and varieties, followed by a hands-on Pumpkin Math activity. During Pumpkin Math, students estimated and measured various pumpkin attributes, including height, weight, circumference, ribs, and seeds. The interactive seed counting activity involved using mats and coffee filters to organize and count seeds, enhancing their mathematical skills. The outdoor tour focused on the prairie, exploring its benefits, different types, historical significance, and plant uses by Native Americans and early settlers.

Fun Fact: the pumpkin with the most seeds in 2023 totaled 856, the lowest 89, and the average number of seeds 443!

Summer Field Trips
Our five summer field trips of 2023 were each structured to cater to the needs and interests of each group. Activity stations offered a blend of nature-focused activities and outdoor exploration, and of course, the fish-feeding breaks at the koi pond were a hit!

Kids Garden Art Camp
In collaboration with Art on the Fly, our inaugural Kids Garden Art Camp was a vibrant 3-day experience for children ages 6-11. Centered around our 2023 theme, Monet in the Gardens, the camp featured art projects, gardening activities, and two cornerstone projects: a water lily-adorned Adirondack chair and a Monet poster replicating the “Japanese Footbridge.” The auction of the Adirondack chair raised over $500, supporting the success of the summer art camp. A special thank you to all supporters of this program! For those who couldn’t attend all three days, daily crafts allowed kids to jump right in without missing a beat. The camp included an open house for showcasing art projects and a future auction of the Adirondack chair and a Monet poster replicating the “Japanese Footbridge.”

StoryWalk
Our StoryWalk kicked off was held in June in a new location – the Nancy Yahr Memorial Children’s Garden! In collaboration with Hedberg Public Library, families enjoyed activities, crafts, and games related to this year’s featured book, “A Good Place” by Lucy Cousins. The kick-off event celebrated the first day of summer, offering donation-based admission all day, with special activities between 9 am and 11 am. Throughout the summer to October, visitors experienced the interactive StoryWalk featuring “A Good Place” by Lucy Cousins. This engaging program promoting literacy, reading, health, exercise, and movement for children showcased the vibrant “Pollinator Paradise” of the Children’s Garden. With a mini amphitheater and the “Journey of the Imagination” sculpture, the garden provided an enchanting setting for StoryWalk and other children’s programs.

Story and Stroll
Rotary Botanical Gardens’ well-received youth program series, “Story and Stroll,” offered a delightful mix of early literacy, activities, games, and crafts. Held on the first Wednesday of the month from May-October, the one-hour sessions featured a half-hour story time and a half-hour of themed outdoor activity. 2023 Story & Stroll themes, including “Colors and Shapes,” “Creatures and Critters,” “Fruits & Veggies,” and “Pumpkins, Squash, and Gourds - Oh My!” The $3/child cost allowed kids to jump right in without missing a beat. The camp included an open house for showcasing art projects and a future auction of the Adirondack chair and a Monet poster replicating the “Japanese Footbridge.”

Each session offered take-home items for creative expression and to reinforce early literacy concepts. Children and their families could explore the Gardens at no extra cost after the program.

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Education
YOUTH AND FAMILY
Earth Day Celebration
This year’s Earth Day Celebration was a vibrant testament to the Gardens’ commitment to sustainability and earth-friendly practices, highlighting its role as a living museum and cultural institution. As responsible stewards of the land, the Gardens welcomed 600 adults and children to a free public event that showcased interactive storytelling education, family-friendly garden adventures and games, and hands-on projects. The event emphasized the vital connection between plants and people. Sponsored by Upper Iowa University-Janesville and in collaboration with 14 community organizations, including the Rock County Beekeepers Association and the Children’s Museum of Rock County, the celebration was a collective effort to promote environmental awareness. Special guest Zoozort captivated the audience with three amazing live animal shows, providing insights into animal behavior, species abilities, and habitats. As part of the community’s collective effort, RBG collected 150 pairs of gently worn, used, and new shoes for donation, supporting responsible recycling and micro-entrepreneurship in developing countries.

Sunday Classics Music Series
The debut 2023 classical music series resonated as a remarkable success! Over five unforgettable afternoons, we extended the gift of free musical experience to over 850 individuals through Friend membership benefits and admission-based access. This new cultural initiative invited patrons to immerse themselves in the walk-along experience of the world’s best-loved classical melodies, turning our Gardens into a symphony of both sight and sound. Local talent such as Spring Night Flutes, Soverhill String Trio, and George Tucker Native American Flute graced the gardens, presenting compositions spanning diverse eras and styles, captivating audiences and rekindling a revitalized appreciation for classical arts. Sponsorship ensured a sophisticated yet accessible cultural experience, backing our commitment to fair compensation for artists and the curation of an increasingly diverse and professional lineup. We are already busy crafting a note-worthy 2024 series and look forward to sharing it with you.

British Boots & Bonnets Classic Car Show
The British Boots & Bonnets car club from Rockford, IL, made an appearance for a 4th year, showcasing a stunning display of classic British automobiles. Club members generously shared their passion for these iconic cars, offering visitors the chance to explore the vehicles and engage with their owners amongst the Gardens oasis. This event was included in a Gardens’ admission ticket and was a celebration of automotive history.

Garden Art Exhibits: Lucky Ladybugs
The Annual Garden Art Exhibit, a celebrated summer feature at Rotary Botanical Gardens on display May-September, brought culture and fun to the garden experience. Placed throughout the gardens, the captivating display dazzled 150,000 garden visitors. Established in 2009, this community-focused event serves as a canvas for local artistic talent. Each year, in collaboration with the interactive StoryWalk, RBG selects an exhibit theme. The “Grumpies,” a group of skilled RBG volunteer carpenters, expertly craft wooden creatures for local artists to adorn. Featuring 33 “Lucky Ladybugs,” the exhibit was integral to the Gardens, enhancing the overall experience amidst 20 acres of blooming flowerbeds, bubbling water features, and serene nooks. Access to the exhibit was included in garden admission and Friends of the Garden Membership.

Blood Drives
We hosted four blood drives, registering 331 donors and collecting 260 units of blood, plus 10 first-time donors joining our cause. With the potential to save 780 lives, the impact of these blood drives is truly remarkable!

Weddings in the Garden
The Sunken Garden proved the popular location for 24 wedding ceremonies, with 13 on-site receptions, crafting a year filled with love and unforgettable celebrations.

Community Connections
Throughout 2023, our Gardens were buzzing with vibrant community interactions. We joyously hosted 700 PJ students along with their family members during an exclusive night. The Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin (DSAW) visited six times, where kids and families enjoyed Storytime and engaging activities in the Garden. The Kandu – Livin’ & Learnin’ group generously volunteered monthly, contributing their time to enhance the Garden’s beauty.

2023 Spring & Fall Plant Sales
Our annual Spring Plant Sale offered a diverse array of beautiful plants, unique varieties of tomatoes & peppers, herbs, perennials, woody plants, bagged mushroom compost, obelisks and more. Exclusive access on Thursday, May 4, was granted to RBG members, who enjoyed a 10% discount and early shopping privileges. The sale continued for the public from May 5 to May 7, with proceeds supporting the Garden’s mission.

Similarly, the Fall Plant Sale, featuring large mums, asters, perennials, and bagged compost, was a resounding success from September 7-10. Exclusive member access ensured early shopping and discounts. This year’s sale not only enhanced your gardens but also contributed significantly to sustaining the Rotary Botanical Gardens. Our Go Green initiatives, spotlighting the importance of perennial plants for sustainability, have inspired community-wide efforts towards eco-friendly practices.

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The 2023 Holiday Light Show marked a record year, attracting 60,000 visitors, including 550 people on Members Premier Night, and successfully completing 27 event nights without cancellations due to weather. With 87 dedicated garden volunteers contributing 1,456 hours, the family-friendly walking tour through our 20-acre garden showcased 1.5 million lights and 5,047 holiday cookies. The show’s sustainability efforts included converting a significant portion of lights to LED and using 2,475 recycled luminaries. As a crucial feature fundraiser for the gardens, the 2023 Holiday Light Show played a vital role in supporting our non-profit’s annual operating budget, making it a resounding success and a festive joy during the holiday season. We also hosted 10 private parties under the lights, and the current waitlist proves high demand.

**Fun Facts**

**1,456 VOLUNTEER HOURS**
**1.5 MILLION LIGHTS**
**12,640 CUPS OF HOT COCOA**
**5,047 HOLIDAY COOKIES**
**2,475 RECYCLED LUMINARIES**

**Morning with Santa**

In its third consecutive year, the Morning with Santa program brought joy and festive cheer to all who attended. The three sessions were sold out, showcasing the popularity of this cherished event. Families and children engaged in holiday-themed crafts, games, activities, and stories, creating a merry atmosphere. The highlight, of course, was the opportunity for everyone to photograph special moments with Santa Claus. The event was a cheerful success, spreading holiday spirit and creating lasting memories for all participants.

**The Numbers**

- **150,000+ visitors** annually
- **35,200** engaged social media followers
- **125,000 youth and family explorers**
- **1,055** Member households
- **450** local volunteers
- **38,000** monthly newsletter subscribers
- **60,000 visitors** attend the annual Holiday Light Show each year
- **840,000** annual website visits

**The Magic of the Season**

**Holiday Light Show**

**Statement of Activities**

**REVENUE**

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**EXPENSES**

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<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>$5,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility Rental</td>
<td>$19,200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENSES</strong></td>
<td>$1,229,021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NET OPERATING INCOME</strong></td>
<td>$30,480</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statement of Financial Position**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2023</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NET ASSETS without donor restrictions</strong></td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets released from restrictions</td>
<td>(22,995)</td>
<td>(17,199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets without donor restrictions</td>
<td>(22,995)</td>
<td>(17,199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NET ASSETS released from restrictions</strong></td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets released from restrictions</td>
<td>(22,995)</td>
<td>(17,199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NET ASSETS released from retained earnings</strong></td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets at beginning of year</td>
<td>1,051,075</td>
<td>3,007,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets at end of year</td>
<td>1,051,075</td>
<td>3,007,328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Revenue**

- **Memorials/Contributions/Grants**
- **Admission Revenue**
- **Cottage Garden Gallery Revenue**
- **Adult Education Programs**
- **Youth and School Programs**
- **Family Programs**
- **Sunday Classics in the Garden**
- **Garden Art Sales**
- **Spring Plant Sale**
- **Fall Plant Sale**
- **Holiday Light Show**
- **Garden Hardscape**
- **Facility Usage**

**Expenses**

- **Financing Expense**
- **Volunteer & Member**
- **Memorial**
- **Grounds**
- **Marketing**
- **Educational Programs**
- **Office exp**
- **Occupancy**
- **Cottage Garden Gallery**
- **Sunday Classics**
- **Garden Art**
- **Spring Plant Sale**
- **Fall Plant Sale**
- **Holiday Light Show**
- **Garden Hardscape**
- **Salaries and Wages**
- **Payroll Benefits**
- **Professional Fees**
- **Professional Development**
- **Facility Rental**

**Statement of Activities**

**Statement of Financial Position**

**The Numbers**

- **150,000+ visitors** annually
- **35,200** engaged social media followers
- **125,000 youth and family explorers**
- **1,055** Member households
- **450** local volunteers
- **38,000** monthly newsletter subscribers
- **60,000 visitors** attend the annual Holiday Light Show each year
- **840,000** annual website visits