

Olbrich Botanical Gardens

Fact Sheet

June 2009

Historical Note

Michael B. Olbrich partnered with the City of Madison and the Madison Parks and Pleasure Drive Association to insure that land along the east shore of Lake Monona was preserved for parklands on Madison's East Side. His commitment to public/private partnership and the commitment of John Olin Foundation not only created Olbrich Park, but also inspired the formation of Olbrich Botanical Gardens and the public/private partnership that makes it possible.

Attendance and Access

Garden Hours:

April – September, 8 am – 8 pm

October, 9 am – 6 pm

November – March, 9 am – 4 pm

Bolz Conservatory, Library, Gift Shop, 10 am – 4 pm (year-round)

Free Public Garden: Outdoor gardens – Free! Bolz Conservatory - \$1 for age 6 and up. (free to all 10 -noon Wed & Sat)

Annual Attendance: 250,000 + from 9 am – 4 pm (visitors not counted before 9 am or after 4 pm)

Private Uses (rentals):

1,475 in 2007 (including 91 weddings as well as receptions, parties, corporate meetings and events, memorial services, garden club meetings, Madison Metropolitan School District meetings, school tours, formal photography, guided tours, and more.)

Population & Growth

The increase in everyday visitors at Olbrich has paralleled the Madison metropolitan region population increases over the past 18 years. Based on population growth estimates, in 2025, Olbrich attendance will be, conservatively, 325,000 visitors

Olbrich Botanical Gardens' attendance increased from 100,000 in 1992 to 250,000 in 2007 -- an increase of 150% in 15 years.

Financial Support

Public/Private Partnership:

The public/private partnership between the City of Madison Parks Division and the non-profit Olbrich Botanical Society is considered one of the most successful of its kind both regionally and in the public garden field. The two entities share equally in funding the gardens, keeping them free, providing inspirational gardening ideas, and educational programs that neither could do on its own.

Membership: 5,459 households representing 8,419 individuals (based on membership cards issued). One of every 43 adults in the region is an Olbrich member, making Olbrich one of the largest membership organizations in the region. Membership has increased 39% since 1999.

Public Support: Olbrich Botanical Gardens earns \$325,629 in revenues that directly offset the City of Madison's total support of 1,475,486 leaving a net of \$1,149,857.

Private Support:

Olbrich Botanical Society raises +\$1 million each year from earned revenue (special events and sales), and donations (including membership dues). The majority of the funds raised are from individuals who contribute \$1,000 or less.

Endowment:

The Olbrich Botanical Society Foundation was created in 2001 to manage an endowment for the Gardens. Bequests, planned gifts, and other designated donations are transferred to the Foundation's endowment fund. Each year a distribution is made from the Foundation to support the Gardens' operating budget. The 2007 distribution of \$131,000 is approximately 4.5% of the assets of the Foundation averaged over 3 years.

Economic Impact

Quality of Life:

- Olbrich Botanical Gardens is frequently cited as one of the many reasons that Madison is such a highly rated city.
- 2004 - Horticulture Magazine named Olbrich Botanical Gardens one of the 10 most inspirational gardens in the country.
- 2005 – Olbrich Botanical Gardens received the Garden of Excellence award from the American Public Garden Association
- 2008 – Olbrich Botanical Gardens included on Mayor Cieslewicz’s Top 10 TNS (The Natural Step) projects that demonstrate effective use of Madison’s designated green planning process, The Natural Step.

Support of Local Business:

250,000 + annual visitors shop in local stores, eat at local restaurants, and stay at local hotels. Private rentals of Olbrich facilities support local caterers and other vendors.

Green Jobs:

Olbrich provides good-paying jobs in a green environment for its permanent 31 staff members (in the 2008 budgets) Both the City of Madison and Olbrich Botanical Society provide excellent employee benefits including health insurance for permanent employees who work at least 20 hours per week. In addition, 8.64 FTE’s, primarily interns, are hired on a seasonal or hourly basis.

Community

Volunteers: 600+ area residents donate 26,000 hours of labor to Olbrich each year as volunteers, an activity which they report enriches their lives and gives them an opportunity to give back to the community.

Partnerships:

Olbrich is home to the Thai Pavilion and Garden, the result of a partnership with the University of Wisconsin Alumni Association, Thailand, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Olbrich’s cooperation with community groups and neighborhood associations includes

- Educational signage along Starkweather Creek
- Increased emphasis on multi-mode access including bussing and biking
- Collaborative education programming with the Madison School Community Recreation, Neighborhood House-East and East Madison Community Center, and the Madison Public Library

Access: Olbrich demonstrates a commitment to diverse audiences through programs such as free electric tram, scooters and wheel chairs; Children of the Rain Forest; Children’s Garden Programming; and Thai Fest.

Free Public Events:

Olbrich Gardens enriches the lives of visitors and neighbors by providing a number of free community events and hosting events organized by mission-related organizations such as garden clubs. These events include more than two dozen free concerts, garden club flower shows, art exhibits, educational exhibits, and a fall and spring multi-week flower show.

Environmental Commitment

Green Mission: Olbrich has dedicated itself to eco-friendly sustainable gardening, and to sharing its professional knowledge with the public through example and an active education program.

Green Team: Olbrich’s Green Team was developed to empower staff to suggest positive changes in our operations for improved sustainability. Mayor Cieslewicz included Olbrich on his list of 2008 Top 10 TNS (The Natural Step) projects which demonstrate effective use of Madison’s designated green planning process, The Natural Step.

Education: 4,964 individuals attended education classes at Olbrich Botanical Gardens in 2007, including more than 1,000 children.

Leaf Mulch:

Olbrich Gardens uses leaf mulch which is produced on site from locally collected leaves. This environmentally-friendly product has many benefits:

- It protects plants by controlling soil erosion and retaining moisture in the soil while adding nutrients and improving soil structure.
- The City’s Streets Department saves gas and time by delivering a portion of local leaves collected in the fall to Olbrich rather than to the recycle centers in Waunakee and Verona.

- Leaf mulch has proven such a benefit to Olbrich Gardens' soil, that there is a local demand from amateur gardeners for the product which is packaged and sold in spring and fall – diverting more leaves from recycling centers and also providing financial support for the Gardens.

The Gardens' Future

- Through community planning sessions, a plan for future growth has been developed and includes
 - additional programming space to meet the educational needs of a growing population, including children, families, schools, and adults.
 - additional space to accommodate basic visitor needs, including orientation, restrooms, and food service
 - a new indoor/outdoor children's/home demonstration garden
 - initiatives to sustain the Starkweather Creek shoreline
 - development of an Urban Tree Laboratory
 - revitalization of the Rock Garden, transforming it into a Dry Garden
 - comprehensive interpretation for visitors
 - increased children's and adult programming, both on- and off-site
 - increasing the diversity of visitors who participate at Olbrich including seniors, children, less able-bodied and minority visitors
 - increased commitment to sustainability as utilized in the City of Madison's adopted sustainability program – The Natural Step.
- Olbrich contributes substantially to neighborhood revitalization. As the Gardens grow, Olbrich's role in neighborhood revitalization on the greater Eastside will increase.