

## **University of Washington Botanic Gardens: genesis and future**

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It is now a little over nine months since I arrived at the University of Washington from Australia, so this timeframe suggests that my thoughts on the Arboretum are now due....

First of all I want to say how wonderful it has been to find such fervor and commitment to the place, particularly from the dedicated staff out on the grounds and the education program. I would also like to acknowledge the enduring support of the Arboretum Foundation in funding that education program, the arborist, and our summer gardeners. Clearly, without this latter support of maintenance we could not operate as well as we do.

And it is to that word maintenance I wish to return throughout my remarks about the future of the collections at the Arboretum as part — the most internationally significant part — of my vision for the recently established UW Botanic Gardens.

Early in June 2005, to the published acclaim of both Seattle Parks and the Arboretum Foundation, the University approved the umbrella name, University of Washington Botanic Gardens, for the entities I am charged to manage on its behalf: Washington Park Arboretum (with, of course, Seattle Parks and Recreation), the Center for Urban Horticulture, Elisabeth C. Miller Library, Union Bay Natural Area, and the Otis Douglas Hyde Herbarium, none of which changes its name. Together they are greater than the sum of their parts.

Some Botanic Gardens facts are on the sheet you all have in front of you. The new umbrella name, which was coined by one of the Arboretum's horticultural staff, came from a facilitated workshop a few weeks after my arrival in Seattle in mid February. At that workshop, we also came up with vision and mission statements that crystallize our position in the University and the community in general:

*Vision: As an international hub for plant science, information, teaching, and stewardship, the Gardens will promote an educated, inspired, and engaged society dedicated to sustainable ecosystem management*

*Mission: Sustaining managed to natural ecosystems and the human spirit through plant research, display, and education*

All these issues would have been unfamiliar to classical botanic gardens and arboreta devoted initially to demonstrating medicinal plants and later the display of the plant realm of 'creation', to be followed by their utilitarian role in promoting the introduction and spread of commercially significant plantation crops. A modern botanic garden and arboretum have bigger issues to address and are even more relevant, I believe, to society, than ever before.

Central to the role of a modern botanic gardens organization is its crucial role as a facilitator and educator in horticultural practice. It is important that the Gardens, particularly the Arboretum, be a regional leader in best practice in the wise use of water and chemicals, care of soil, and implementation of integrated pest management. In all this, our aims fit into those broader ones of the College of Forest Resources, and, beyond that, the University of Washington in its striving for 'sustainability' in this country.

When being considered for the dual post of Director of the Arboretum and Director of the Center for Urban Horticulture, tied to the Soest Chair in Horticultural Science, one of the things that attracted me was the fact that the Arboretum Master Plan was in existence. Such a document is a major achievement. It is visionary in all sorts of ways and is appropriate for a world-class collection of trees and shrubs — the Arboretum's status being, I regret to say, apparently rather little understood by the Seattle public as yet, despite the overwhelming zeal of gardeners in this, one of the most remarkable horticultural hotspots on the planet.

Also little understood is that it is in effect a joint management venture of the City and University and represents a remarkable symbiosis. I am aware that in the past it has not been so happy a relationship, but I would like to put on record the absolute devotion to collaboration and the advancement of this place shown by both University and City crews: this has much to do with the remarkable people doing this job and, from the University side, I would like to commend the splendid efforts of Rory Denovan and his manager Peggy Pullen, and others on the Operations Committee to the Superintendent who have all given me nothing but support and friendly advice. And I should add the great support of the City's Tree, Heavy Equipment, and Landscape Crews.

Our strengths therefore are not only the Collection and the Master Plan with a commitment to fund at least the early stages of its implementation, but our people from both City and University out on the grounds. In this year we have seen the presentation of the Wayfinding Plan funded by the University and the completion through the City of the Duck Bay Restoration and the Pinetum Loop Trail. In the north we have seen the refining and completion of work by both crews in the oaks as well as the Pinetum. These are magnificent achievements. To the south we have an action plan for moving off the internationally significant holly collection from the

ecogeographic gardens site to the Interlaken-Boyer-Lake Washington Boulevard triangle — and Iain Robertson has been persuaded to provide the design of the new holly garden pro bono. This is a hugely significant gesture. These have all been good news.

Bad news is that our major weaknesses are that we do not have enough of the good people who have made these things happen, nor indeed the space for more of them, in the Arboretum as it stands, let alone taking on more management issues with the intense horticulture we will need in the new ecogeographic gardens, which I now understand more deeply from my study of the ecogeographic gardens – the oldest in the world – in the Botanischer Garten, Berlin, Germany, I visited in the spring.

I have therefore been very happy to respond to Washington State Senator Jacobson's questions about what we would need to bring the place as it stands up to snuff in terms of maintenance. It is my sincere hope that this information will make its way to Olympia and appropriate funding. I, and indeed the University as a whole, cannot, of course, lobby, but there are other people, here and elsewhere, who can. Our Arboretum was designated as a State Arboretum — and is still the only one in Washington so designated — I believe that this State asset should be appropriately State-funded. Meanwhile, we should pursue the initiative of one of our Parks Commissioners to raise a seriously committed professional corps of maintenance volunteers — we can identify particular parts of the Arboretum such groups could adopt and I look forward to taking this forward with all parties concerned.

Until these things come to pass — as I go around the world where people in different continents congratulate me in having been given the job to care for one of the world's most significant collections of trees — I have to wear the shame that the level of maintenance we

can presently achieve, even with our devoted staff, is, quite frankly, an international disgrace.

In the light of this it would be completely irresponsible of us, in my opinion, to embark on projects where we do not have the assurance of maintenance support in perpetuity. It was with enormous pleasure, then, that discussions with one donor this summer led to the splendid benefaction allowing us not only to build the first of the ecogeographic gardens — Chile — leading up from the Stone Cottage on Lake Washington Boulevard, but also to endow a position to maintain it in perpetuity. I see this as the model for further developments of the Master Plan.

My vision for the Arboretum and for the Botanic Gardens in general, as we say in our vision statement, is to be a hub for horticultural endeavor — education, display, and research — in the Pacific Northwest. I should explain here that I say the Botanic Gardens in general because other sections of the Botanic Gardens are responsible for all the propagation that goes on in the Arboretum, as well as for the overall management of both the education program and management of the Graham Visitors Center. Moreover the voucher herbarium for the Arboretum — the Otis Douglas Hyde Herbarium — is housed in Merrill Hall, on the other side of the Montlake Cut, as is the Miller Library which has all the important Arboretum special book collections at its heart. The tentacles of Washington Park Arboretum spread throughout the Botanic Gardens.

The Botanic Gardens — as you can see from the fact sheet — have enormous reach into the community and a great part of this is from the Arboretum. I believe we have a great opportunity to build on what we have inherited to create something to address pressing environmental issues in this country and to be a true plant knowledge focus for the Pacific Northwest and beyond. At the same time, the Arboretum is the local park — and what a park! — for the

adjoining neighborhoods and we need to work with those neighborhoods on common environmental threats facing us locally, as well as providing those people with appropriate park experiences.

As an aside, we must be one of the few botanic gardens organizations or indeed significant park where a highway interchange is mooted for its heart.

But we have much to do besides facing that threat – not only in getting the maintenance right (and putting further up our list of priorities making new space available for an increasing staff) and funding the Master Plan but also the funding and re-establishment of the position of Curator of Plant Collections. With these three things in place and a clearly defined Pacific Northwest identity to the Arboretum and the rest of the Gardens, I believe we will have something to be genuinely proud of. I look to you for support in this endeavor.

Thank you.