MESSAGE from the DIRECTOR

This past year has presented me with the opportunity to serve as interim director of Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum while the director, Bob Grese, has been on sabbatical leave from the university. What attracted me to take on this appointment was the chance to see how MBGNA operates from the inside and to develop better and long-lasting connections with the University Herbarium, where I also serve as the director. The focus of the Gardens and the Arboretum is on living plants, whereas the Herbarium takes care of a collection of 1.7 million specimens of dried plants of historical and scientific value for Michigan and other areas of the globe. I believe that we are natural partners, and we have begun collaborating on projects such as the new Great Lakes Gardens at the Botanical Garden and a jointly sponsored web site providing key information on the more than 2,500 plant species that are native or naturalized in Michigan.

In addition, I learned of the many ways in which MBGNA engages the community: Shakespeare in the Arb every summer, the spring plant sale, and hosting school groups and thousands of visitors each year, just to name a few. One of the most successful programs began two years ago, and we hope it will become a fixture every year: our summer internship program. This allows up to 30 undergraduate and graduate students to engage in projects at the Garden and Arboretum during the peak period of activity and plant growth in the late spring and summer. It is a win/win situation for the students and for us.

I leave my year at Matthaei and Nichols convinced that the organization is in excellent shape and clearly on the upswing. This can be seen in the completion of projects such as the Conservatory glass replacement and new shade system, the dedication of the Sue Reichert Discovery Trail, and the 100th anniversary celebration of the institution. Work began this year on the Gaffield Children's Garden, and the Great Lakes Garden is in full development mode. Hopefully to the delight of most members and visitors, we will be paving the entrance and parking lots of the Botanical Gardens next spring, thanks to funding secured from the university this year.

None of this happens without a dynamic and dedicated staff, and this is MBGNA's greatest asset. We have seen the Development office grow and take on an important new role in helping to endow the organization's future, and nearly every area of the Garden and Arboretum has undergone self-examination and reorganization. I have to say that both in terms of physical space and people’s commitment, we are literally bursting at the seams. This is a good sign but will require necessary adjustments in the future, and we hope to count on your continued support in helping us grow. An ongoing theme to the Garden’s mission will be sustainability and sound ecological practices wherever possible. Look to MBGNA to be a leader is showing ways in which these concepts can apply to your own homes and lives.

Paul E. Berry
Interim Director
August 1, 2007–July 31, 2008

Cover photo: The Spathodea campanulata, African tulip tree, which was planted in 1974, responded to the increased light and improved environment in the tropical house by bursting into its most glorious bloom ever.
Our conservatory is a winter oasis for the community and a living museum of tropical, temperate and desert plants. It is also the largest university-operated conservatory in the nation and the only conservatory designed by Alden Dow, Michigan’s architect laureate.

After 40 years of use, it was time to upgrade the glass and environmental controls in order to protect the building, the plants, and our visitors. While “state of the art” when built, there have been tremendous improvements in glass and environmental controls since 1960. The original glass was susceptible to damage in stormy conditions, creating a safety hazard for our visitors and collections. It was not energy-efficient. The glazing necessary to protect the plants from the summer sun always looked dirty. The old environmental controls were manually operated and weren’t responsive to sudden changes in the weather outside. Nor could they be moved during the evening and night when staff was not present.

This year, the glass was replaced with two layers of tempered glass that has an energy efficient plastic coating between the layers. This glass is heavier than the old, but engineering studies by U-M students found that the original support structure would bear the new load. Glazing is no longer necessary, so the roof is clean and clear. A thermal cloth blanket that can be closed as needed to hold in the heat on cold winter nights or minimize the hot sun in the middle of July was installed. In addition, the vents were mechanized and a mister was installed to help create the necessary level of humidity. These new environmental controls are all computer-operated so that we now have control 24/7.

The benefits have been tremendous. First, our visitors can safely remain in the Conservatory during storms. We expect our heating bills to decrease. And the plants have responded to their improved environment by growing and blooming like never before. If you haven’t visited lately, we invite you to come and see the changes for yourself.

Above: The Conservatory roof before the renovation
Below: The Conservatory roof after the renovation
INTERPRETING *our* COLLECTIONS

Over the years, we have had a marvelous opportunity to enrich the visitor experience by providing beautiful seasonal displays and a fantastic permanent collection. And in more recent years we have added exhibit information that we hope engages and enriches your visit to the Conservatory.

Renovations to the Conservatory kept doors closed for part of the year; a small display on how a greenhouse and conservatory operate was presented in the lobby while we anxiously waited for its reopening. In 2007 our theme for conservatory displays and exhibits was focused on our centennial. The interpretation of our fall display reflected back to the elaborate chrysanthemum displays of the 1920s and ’30s at the Iroquois site, featuring both trained and normal growth forms. The winter display helped transfer the central theme to the 2008 theme “Passion for Plants.” Winter blooms were explored in a “Science of the Season” display with the interpretative focus on plant photoperiodism. Later we shared our staff favorites for springtime color and visitors were asked to share their favorites, too! The display, a beautiful collection of spring bulbs and native wildflowers, was spread throughout the Conservatory instead of being concentrated in the rear of the temperate house.

We’ve had a lot of fun creating beautiful displays and interesting exhibits, and we hope you have enjoyed them as well. As the plants continue to adapt to their improved environment, we are looking forward to the new interpretive opportunities that will arise.

*By the numbers*

**No. 1**
largest university-operated conservatory in the country

**98**
years the oldest plants in the Conservatory have been in the collection

**1,000**
different species housed under its roof

**1965**
year Conservatory was built

**3,584**
panes of glass that make up the Conservatory’s new roof

**13,500**
square feet occupied by the Conservatory
Cards like these, featuring flowers, pollinators, and more, were used to teach young patients and their families as they played a variety of familiar games.
A big obstacle to our nature program was that we couldn’t really bring nature indoors – there would be too many risks for the hospitalized children with items that couldn’t be sanitized. The MBGNA education interns put their combined artistic talents, their love for nature, and their desire to help children learn and grow to work in order to create nature games and crafts to bring to the hospital activity rooms.

One of the most imaginative activities the interns created was a set of cards with botanical and zoological images, used to play many games like Memory or Poison Ivy. For several months, interns made bi-weekly trips to the hospital to bring a little nature inside. Everyone – patients, parents and interns – enjoyed the program.

“Go Blue Discover Green started as just a summer enrichment program, but it soon became so much more,” said Mary Plato, Mott Hospital teacher. Summer ended as did the summer enrichment program. But the knowledge that this was a good partnership lingered. A few emails, phone calls and meetings through the fall led to a new collaboration: this time the Go Blue Discover Green program would operate with university student volunteers. Coordinated by education staff, the program resumed early in 2008. Students were recruited and trained and the program instituted a bi-weekly schedule with 20 volunteers.

The program has accomplished more than we ever hoped, and the educational value of the program proved to be only one of many benefits. The personal relationships that developed between students and patients were greatly valued by both parties. Erin Allen, one of the initial interns and the program assistant for the winter, explained, “I really enjoyed spending time with the kids at Mott Children’s Hospital. They always looked forward to my visit and were excited to see me when I came.” Likewise, Mott staff told us the children could sense the genuine care and concern our interns and students felt for each of them. The children constantly buzzed about the program as they waited for it to begin.

“The program was a great diversion and distraction for our patients,” Mary Plato explained. “The games were everyone’s favorite. They loved playing them with the students each week. This program really offered something new and unique. The students were so dedicated and loyal, really top notch, and I loved that Go Blue Discover Green added something pleasant to the hospital experience for each child.”

Mary Plato
Teacher at Mott Hospital
INSPIRATION. CONSERVATION. EDUCATION. INVESTIGATION. PARTICIPATION. These are some of the reasons that people come to the Arb and Gardens. Our mission is to promote environmental enjoyment, stewardship and sustainability through education, research, and interaction with the natural world. Whether it is by using rain barrels, growing your own vegetables, converting your lawn to meadow or prairie, changing lawn care practices to more environmentally friendly ones, you can try these at home. Below are three personal accounts from visitors who learned what sustainability in action really means.

Growing Food, Reserving Seeds  
ERIC KAMPE

I had the pleasure of volunteering in the MBGNA greenhouses this past spring propagating heirloom vegetables for Project Grow Community Gardens and the annual Spring Plant Sale. We started basil, pepper, eggplant, and tomatoes from seed. We got our hands dirty and learned to prepare soil, sow seeds, transplant seedlings, water, and apply fertilizer. We also had fun chatting about gardening and speculating on how some of the more unusually named heirlooms would turn out.

In the summer I was growing vegetables of all sorts for the “Gathering of Gardens” exhibit. There was plenty to do and learn: designing raised beds (often from reclaimed materials), preparing the soil, choosing vegetable varieties, and determining planting times. I learned which tomatoes I liked best fresh off the vine, and which were better for my canned pasta sauce. I learned which varieties of squash, corn, beans, onions, and potatoes would store well and last beyond the summer season. I saved seed from lettuce, tomato, basil, bean, and squash completing the cycle and bringing my thoughts back to early spring when propagation will begin again.

Having learned to propagate vegetables at Matthaei, I plan to continue doing it in my personal life. I will share the idea with everyone I know. It is so important to grow our own vegetables and I know that others can, too.

I learned how to be a better steward of the earth at MBGNA – you can, too!

Rain Barrels  
CAROL B. RIEDEMAN

I learned about rain barrels at the Spring Plant Sale last year when I saw the demonstration given by TJ Smith of the MBGNA staff. I purchased one right away. This is my second year with an MBGNA rain barrel, and I love it. Having it on our second-story deck (under a leaky gutter) makes watering my container plants a breeze – I don’t have to drag the hose halfway around the house! There’s very little maintenance required. I crush a mosquito dunk in through the mesh once or twice a summer, but since I’m drawing water out daily, stagnant water hasn’t been an issue.

When it’s time to store the barrel for the winter, I fill as many plastic gallon jugs as I have and put them in a deck storage box to freeze. During the winter, I thaw them out as needed and use the water for my houseplants. The plants appreciate the rain water, rather than our treated well water, and I like the fact that my rain barrel is working for me all year long!

Shrinking the Lawn  
MARJORIE BERNDT

I have a beautiful red dogwood tree in my front yard and became concerned that there was too much competition for water and fertilizer from the lawn. In the past, I’ve spaded out the turf and hauled it away. But, as a woman of “a certain age,” I wanted something easier. So I asked some of the MBGNA horticulturists for recommendations on how to easily transition from lawn to groundcovers. They suggested that I smother the grass with layers of newspaper; it would then decompose gradually and be incorporated into the soil. To hide the newspaper and to further conserve moisture, I covered it with bark mulch.

It was simple to do and very effective. The grass is gone and now I’m ready to start planting some groundcovers in its place. I’ll pick some low maintenance varieties that I’ve seen at the Gardens through the years, Epimedium and Sedum to start. Soon I’ll have a beautiful, easy-care bed around my beloved dogwood.

SUSTAINABILITY in ACTION
FINANCIALS
July 1, 2007–June 30, 2008

REVENUES
$2,526,700

- 2.1% Interest Income $52,135
- 2.5% Endowment Distribution $64,029
- 11.1% Program Fees, Admission, and Sales $280,182
- 19.7% Membership, Gifts, and Grants $498,752
- 64.6% University Direct Contribution $1,691,602

EXPENSES
$2,555,846

- 0.3% Scholarships/Fellowships $8,200
- 1.2% Equipment $31,426
- 1.8% Travel/Transportation $45,401
- 2.5% Construction Costs $65,000
- 4.7% Miscellaneous Expenses $120,278
- 5.2% Internal and External Services $132,916
- 8.9% Supplies $228,178
- 75.3% Salaries and Fringe Benefits $1,924,447

IN-KIND SUPPORT
$681,753

- 9.5% Community Service 3,335 hours @ $19.51/hour* $65,066
- 55.7% University Support Utilities and Plant $379,679
- 34.8% Volunteers 12,148 hours @ $19.51/hour** $237,008

MARKET VALUE OF ENDOWMENTS
$1,803,436

CHANGE IN FUND BALANCES

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*dollar value of volunteer hours from Independent Sector
**2006 balances included significant project revenue, particularly the Conservatory roof replacement
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July 1, 2007–June 30, 2008

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Community Support

Over the last year, Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum has reached out to local businesses to support our annual events. It has created a new base of operating support, but more importantly, it has created a necessary link to the community which we anticipate will grow in years to come.

In March, while winter was still upon us, spring was in full bloom in the Conservatory with the “Passion for Spring” bulb display, sponsored by Runciman Landscapes. Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Runciman Landscapes have had a long history together. In 2001, they designed the Urban Pocket Garden, and in 2006, they designed the beautiful Steiner fountains in the Gateway Gardens of New World Plants. When asked why they chose to sponsor the “Passion for Spring” display, designer Max Finkbeiner said, “Basically, we felt that it is important for us to support MBGNA because it promotes exactly what we do to make a living as horticulturists with Runciman Landscapes. From a business point of view, we feel it is beneficial to be involved in the community we work in.”

In May, the summer opened with the 28th Annual Plant Sale, Michigan Public Radio, Michigan Public Television, Korzon Landscapes, and Ten Thousand Villages were sponsors.

Thank you Sponsors! We look forward to working with you again in the future.
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July 1, 2007–June 30, 2008

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Mable and Alan Howes
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DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Spring Plant Sale

The Plant Sale Preview Party for members kicked off a great weekend for the 2008 Spring Plant Sale. Members enjoyed a glass of wine, hors d’oeuvres and an occasional visit by our very own Chocolate fairness while they shopped among our great selection of plants. A festive air prevailed throughout the rest of the weekend when the sale opened to all. Shoppers enjoyed the mini-lectures and demonstrations on a variety of topics presented by our sponsors, staff, volunteers, and vendors. Our vendors (Old House Gardens, Project Grow, Growing Hope, and Native Plant Nursery) were pleased at the opportunity to reach a new audience. Our shoppers also enjoyed being able to purchase some of our plants and gardening supplies at one location. Best yet, they knew they were supporting a great cause.

We are grateful for the support of our members, the public, and our new friends and sponsors (see preceding donor spotlight for the list). Thank you all for making the sale a true success.
It is through gifts like these, that we can art enhances the Conservatory. invite you to come see for yourself how this will run from September to December 2008. The first set, featuring the monarch butterfly, is scheduled for display in the Conservatory. Michigan nature photographer, Steve Nikkila, generosity, a series of photographs by Thanks to Marge and Bob Alpern’s DONOR SPOTLIGHT A Gift of Art Marge Alpern sees artistic beauty in her gardens. As the plants grow and change through the seasons, new shapes and forms appear. She seeks sculptures and objects that complement this naturally evolving beauty. Her appreciation of art and nature as well as her love of Matthaei Botanical Gardens brought her to the decision to make a gift for temporary art displays in the Conservatory. Thanks to Marge and Bob Alpern’s generosity, a series of photographs by Michigan nature photographer, Steve Nikkila, is scheduled for display in the Conservatory. The first set, featuring the monarch butterfly, will run from September to December 2008. Others will appear at regular intervals. We invite you to come see for yourself how this art enhances the Conservatory. It is through gifts like these, that we can make our garden into a destination for people to visit over and over again.
Every year, MBGNA volunteers share many skills with us, whether they are tending the soil, caring for collections, restoring natural areas, welcoming visitors or teaching children about the wonders of nature. In 2007–08 volunteers generously donated over 12,000 hours of service. It is hard to imagine the Gardens and Arb without our devoted crew of volunteers!

Imagine what a harmonious world it could be if every single person, both young and old, shared a little of what he is good at doing.

—QUINCY JONES
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