

Looking to the Future

Grace Chapman

Opportunity:

As younger, more tech-savvy horticulturists enter the public garden field, they should be given the opportunity to use their inherent understanding of technology to help promote the garden to new audiences.

In the Richmond, Virginia, community, we have witnessed a resurgence of urban greening initiatives. An increasing number of greening organizations are popping up around our community, across various sectors. These eager groups want to improve their community and the urban environment. Public gardens can play a critical role in educating and guiding these organizations.



Action:

At Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, we have had great success promoting our plant collections and exhibits through social media. Some of the horticulture staff have helped us catapult our online presence to an international level because they are comfortable contributing their plant knowledge and interests to social media channels. This helps identify them as experts in the field and our Garden as a resource.

Public garden employees have the horticultural expertise that some of the eager, but inexperienced, volunteer greening groups lack. We have extensive experience managing volunteer groups, seeking creative opportunities for funding, and knowing the importance of planning for long-term maintenance.

Public gardens have an opportunity to play a larger role in plant introduction by promoting underused plant species and influencing nursery stock. Our visitors commonly ask where they can find the plants that we display and, more specifically, where they can purchase native plants appropriate for our region. At Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, we have started partnering with local nurseries to suggest plants appropriate to our climate that are successful and popular in the Garden. The nurseries are more willing to take a risk on new plants when they can tell their customers that we are growing them, and we have a place to point visitors when they are looking for unique plants.

The public garden community cannot simply settle with the idea that gardens will attract a certain type of employee or visitor. Gardens need to make sure that they are actively promoting job openings in many different venues. It is also important that public gardens work with colleges and universities in advisory capacities, making sure that course curricula are properly preparing all students for work in the public garden field, not just the green industry. Offering

paid internships with housing stipends can also help to attract students from many different parts of the country.

Challenge:

A challenge will be attracting a public garden workforce and garden visitors who reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. In Richmond, Virginia, our community is quite diverse, but the majority of our botanical garden staff and many of our visitors are Caucasian. Our plant collections represent global plant diversity; the environmental awareness that outdoor experience encourages is universal; and the beauty, peace, and tranquility of our gardens are enjoyed by all genders, races, and ages.

Public and private landscapes are becoming more homogenized and plant selection is being driven by plant breeders and large big-box nurseries.

APGA's Role:

APGA can provide a training role through education and awareness—not only by training staff on using new technology, but also by educating garden administrations about its importance and benefits.

APGA can continue to supply travel scholarships to students, but should ensure that it is actively recruiting at colleges and universities that have more diverse horticulture programs. The association can also offer travel scholarships to professionals from gardens that have a diverse staff to encourage more diverse attendance at the annual meeting, and the opportunity to put together panel discussions about recruiting a diverse workforce.

Two of APGA's main strengths are maintaining a strong network of active gardens and educating its members. APGA can help to highlight the gardens that are taking leadership roles in community greening initiatives and link them with member gardens that are interested in this type of work.

Many public gardens do not have the marketing budget to promote new or underused plants. Some state nursery associations have plant promotion programs. APGA could help to link nursery associations offering new plants to gardens that have an audience of interested visitors.

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