

Looking to the Future

Jennifer Davit

Looking ahead to the next twenty-five years, what are the greatest challenges and opportunities that public gardens will face?

I think public gardens face a significant challenge in balancing innovative technologies while still celebrating the natural world. While at the Lurie Garden, I was unsure about developing a Lurie Garden app for smartphones. The last thing I wanted to do was encourage people to spend more time on their cell phones while in the garden. I wanted to inspire visitors to develop a deeper connection with the natural world and engage with their surroundings directly and not through the layer of technology. We received a grant from The Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust to update our paper brochure, and, in the end, that seemed a better way to help people connect with the garden and enrich their experience.

What can gardens do to overcome these challenges and take advantage of these opportunities?

I think gardens can look to other fields for ways to use technology to advance their operations. Recently we were reviewing ways to improve our online registration and began looking at the hospitality industry, as their online reservations systems are highly evolved and very simple to use. Following proven models from other industries can help public gardens streamline operations and improve the visitor experience.

What role could APGA play in assisting gardens to overcome these challenges and take advantage of these opportunities?

The APGA has recently increased its professional development opportunities, and I think continuing to do so will help individual gardens learn from their neighbors. Perhaps including presentations from institutions outside the botanic garden arena would be helpful. Recently institutions like Longwood Gardens have looked to the hotel industry for standards in visitor services, and I think this sets a great precedent other institutions should follow. Developing corporate partners outside the non-profit community will continue to help public gardens evolve and maintain relevance in our society.

Jennifer Davit is the director of The Lurie Garden.

(PHOTO CREDIT: ROBIN CARLSON)

