

Looking to the Future

Kelly Norris

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

I think public gardens, like much of horticulture, will need to stake strong claims for relevance. This is both a significant challenge and an opportunity. Public horticultural institutions ultimately lead the industry's efforts to enhance social literacy about the relevance of plants and gardens in our lives. We have to inspire people to want something that they do not yet know they need. The passion and pleasure for gardening—both as a process and an experience—offers endless opportunities for enhancing people's lives, even as our industry struggles with how to sell it.

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

The key to successfully harnessing this challenge and this opportunity is to develop strong mission-driven programs and gardens that demonstrate the best horticultural practices and applications. Strong professional practice is the best form of advocacy. In a world with limitless sources of entertainment and information, the strongest efforts to channel people's attentions, affinities, and loyalty win. Horticulture is completely relevant to healthy, beautiful, thriving communities, without which our quality of life would be less vibrant. That fervor and passion is a critical sales tool that public gardens can use to sell programs, membership, and admission.

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

APGA is public horticulture's strongest partner for the exchange of information and highlighting the positive work that member institutions do to benefit the community. APGA represents five hundred diverse organizations—of varying scopes and sizes—with missions that do not always align; it is these differences that underpin the promise of the future. In a fast-paced, ever-changing world, few templates hold true for the success of such a diverse community. APGA's role is to support this diversity through networking programs, conferences, professional accreditations, and a bold public voice (in concert with such organizations as AmericanHort) in support of the need for public horticultural spaces in America's communities.

Kelly Norris is the horticulture manager at Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden. He may be reached at knorris@dmbotanicalgarden.com.

