

## Looking to the Future

*Todd Lasseigne*

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

Public gardens today stand at a unique moment in time—a period of global environmental upheavals, dramatic declines in interest among young adults for careers in horticulture and the plant sciences, and an ever-more competitive market for fundraising dollars. And yet, silver linings of hope exist in the growing recognition by many people that plants, green spaces, and living organisms—set against the backdrop of our increasingly digital and technologically filled world—are important to our lives and psyches. By utilizing amazing new communications tools, unlimited opportunities exist for public gardens to confirm our place as humans in a biologically diverse world and to expose the average person to the wonders of plants—their quirky and fascinating adaptations, stunning beauty, and living presence and importance to our daily lives.



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

Public gardens must continue to seize leadership roles in their communities, leveraging the value that community members place in us so that we can reach broader, more diverse audiences and demonstrate relevance and importance to everyone. We must entwine, inspire, convince, and infuse in as many people as possible our collective passions for plants, gardening, the natural world, and the environment. We must toot our own horns, showcase our expert staff, recruit more celebrities to help us reach the masses, and employ the most innovative and creative marketing geniuses to guide us forward. You'll rarely find a person who truly hates plants, or one who tells you to plant fewer flowers, or hates their beauty. Let's not hide behind our hedges and keep our most sacred plants secret. Let's instead share with evangelical zeal and generosity our plants, our spirit, and our mission.

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

APGA plays important roles for member organizations and their employees, serving as a professional organization that promotes excellence in our field and facilitates professional exchange and the propagation of knowledge of our craft. APGA, branching off as its own organization decades ago, now should seek to connect (or reconnect) to sister or affiliated organizations—AmericanHort, parks associations, the zoo and museum communities, our international counterparts (RHS in particular), ASHS, etc. APGA should work to increase understanding of our importance to political figures and government entities—local, state, regional, national and international. APGA should engage in all efforts to attract more young professionals to our fields of study and passion. APGA should advocate to the masses the importance of public gardens—our indispensability—through the ever-changing media world. APGA should be the voice for all gardens, driven by its members' needs rather than by issues.

*Todd Lasseigne is president and CEO of Tulsa Botanic Garden. He may be reached at [todd@tulsabotanic.org](mailto:todd@tulsabotanic.org).*