

How a Public Garden is Redefining Outreach in the Urban Forest

Tower Hill Botanic Garden's Worcester Tree Initiative Outreach Program

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Tower Hill Botanic Garden Mission

Inspire the use and appreciation of horticulture to **improve** lives, **enrich** communities, and **strengthen** commitment to the natural world.

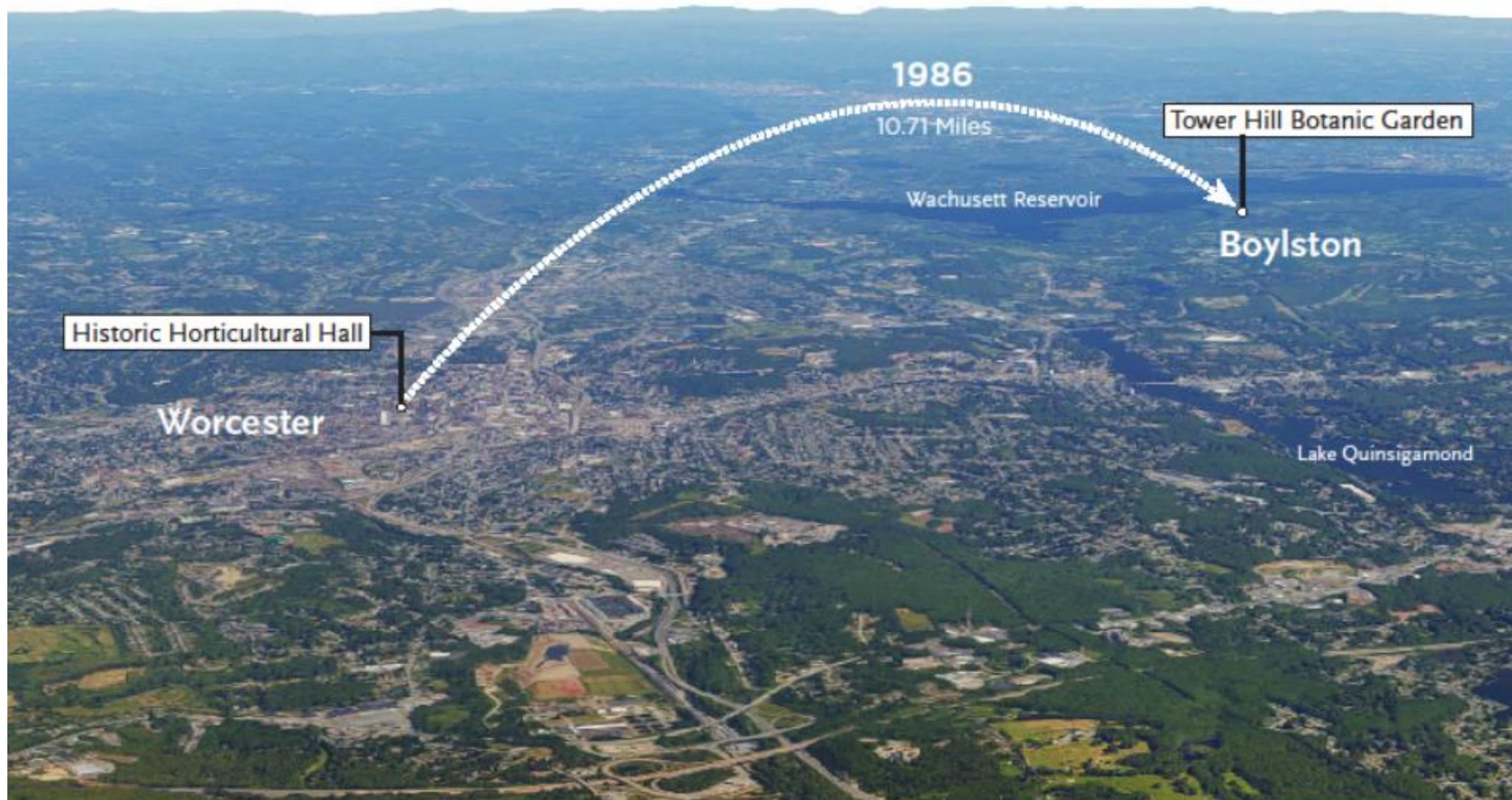


Worcester County Horticultural Society Horticultural Hall



Worcester County Horticultural Society Flower Shows and Vegetable Competitions





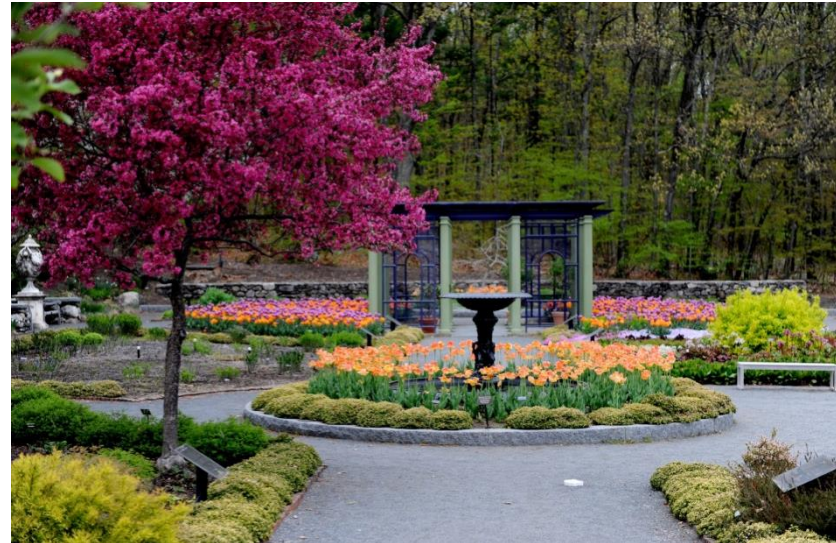
Tower Hill Farm





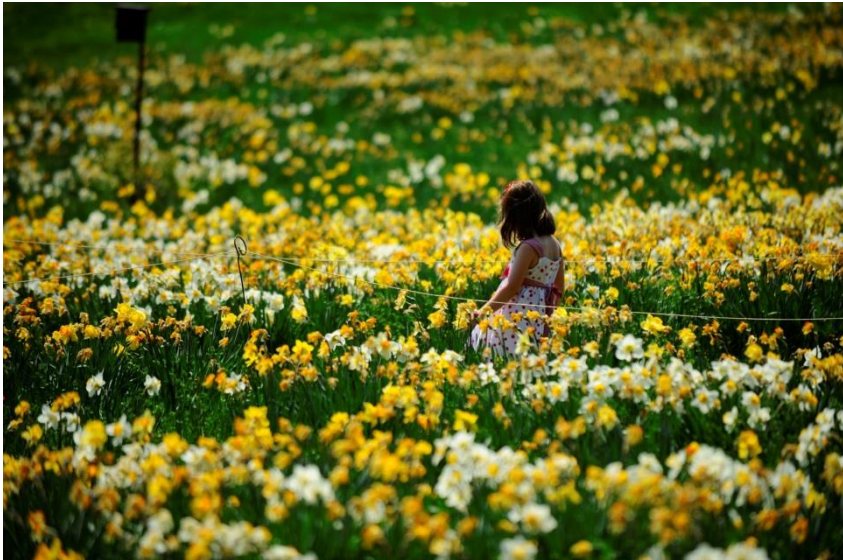
Gardens and collections

Formal Gardens



Gardens and collections

Cultivated Wild



Gardens and collections

Agrarian Gardens



Community Engagement and Impact

Educational Programs and Events



- Focused workshops connect participants with a particular aspect of horticulture or teach a new skill
- Drop-in activities allow visitors to engage with our mission at their own pace
- Interpretive materials enhance the visitor experience, offering new information, insight, and context to our displays

Community Engagement and Impact

Horticulture Therapy Programs



Garden Within Reach

- Universally designed garden
- Opened in late 2015
- Learning environment for people of all abilities
- Annual plantings by volunteers from local organizations serving differently abled adults
- Series of horticulture therapy programs

Garden for All



Worcester Refugee Gardening Program



Botanic Tattoo Weekend

Garden for All



Tower Hill celebrates Worcester Pride Week



- Visitation: **151,000 annually** (80% increase in 5 years)
- Member Households: **8,600**
- Youth and Adults Educated: **10,000 annually**



Success with challenges: Are we a “garden for all?”

► Barriers

- Admission price
- No public transportation option
- Elitist perception of botanic gardens

► What is missing?

- Physical connection to Worcester
- Ability to engage the Worcester community in their own space
- Feeling of abandonment from Worcester residents

WORCESTER, MA

Estimated population: 185,677

White: 69.40%

Black or African American: 13.23%

Asian: 7.31%

Other race: 5.31%

Two or more races: 4.20%

Native American: 0.52%

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 0.04%

Median household income: \$45,869

Mean household income: \$65,446



A horizontal banner image featuring a black silhouette of a tree branch on the left, a small green seedling with two leaves growing from a mound of soil on the right, and a faint city skyline in the background. The text 'Rebuilding Worcester's Urban Forest' is centered in the upper right, and 'WORCESTER TREE Initiative' is at the bottom.

Rebuilding Worcester's Urban Forest

WORCESTER TREE Initiative



Worcester Tree Initiative Began with Pest Devastation

Granville Ave in 2017



**30,000 Trees
January 2009
90% of Worcester's
Burncoat neighborhood's
Trees.**

**To Date:
36,120 Trees Cut
1656 Acres Cut**



Community Trees & Education



Developed Community Outreach Programming- Connecting People & Trees



Youth Programs



Our Mission:

Rebuilding Worcester County's Community Forests

Worcester Tree Initiative exists to grow, care for, and protect Worcester County's urban and town forests. Our community based approach includes education, training, tree planting, and long term monitoring and care to achieve significant improvements to the environment and to the quality of life in our cities and towns.



Merging Organizations

WORCESTER TREE INITIATIVE

TOWER HILL

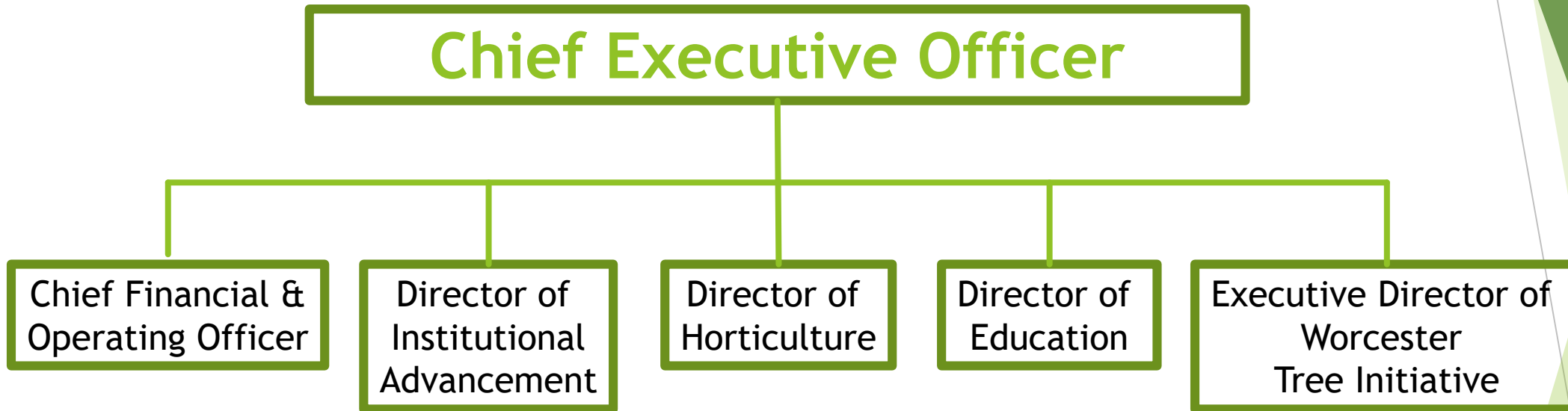
Merging Institutions:

- THBG was fiscal agent to Worcester Tree Initiative since 2009
- Decision by WTI Steering Committee to dissolve or find a permanent situation
- Boards compromised & WTI became independent LLC of THBG
- Period of “Dating” to see if it was a good fit (2015- 2019)

Messaging- from day 1, CEO treated WTI as a department of THBG and messaged it this way

Became a THBG department April 2019- CEO discretion, board accepted it

Organizational Structure:



WTI Executive Director Functions spread to appropriate departments.



The Benefits

INCREASED CAPACITY

Master Tree Stewards
Program

Wider Audience Reach

Expanded Community
Outreach



Expanding Reach

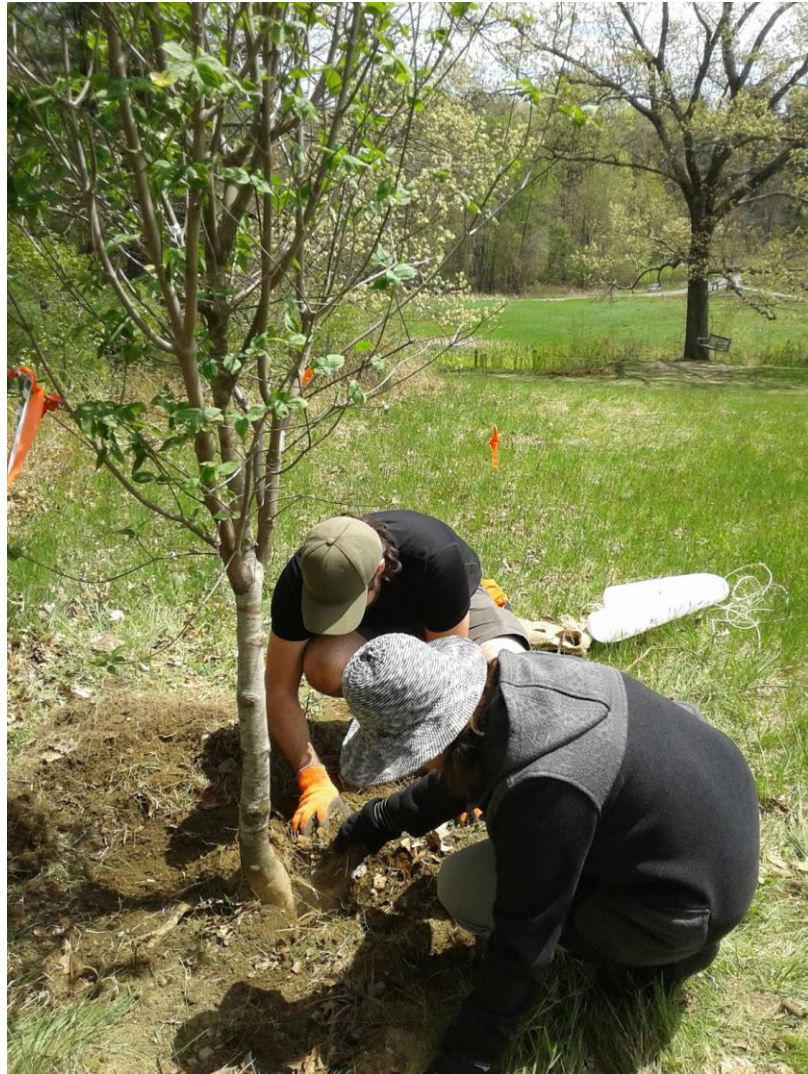
Bringing Tower Hill to the Community



Bringing Worcester Tree to Greater Worcester County



INCREASED PRESENCE



Blending Cultures

Adaptability



Stability



THE HEART OF HORTICULTURE

Worcester County Horticultural Society was formed in 1843 by farmers and prominent members of society with a passion for plants. In its 175 years it has passionately advanced its mission to Connect People and Plants both through events within the community. For 140 years the Horticultural Society operated out of Worcester, MA, called The Heart of the Commonwealth. For many years was set in the city's downtown.



URBAN ROOTS

- 1840's: WCHS founder and early President George Jaques (1863-64) published *A Practical Treatise on the Management of Fruit Trees with descriptive lists...* in 1849; it's an example of the passion for fruit trees in Worcester at the time.
- 1840's - 1870's: several other potential stories about fruit including the rivalry between John Milton Earle and Daniel Waldo Lincoln; each were WCHS presidents and each loved pears. In 1849 JME brought 30 named varieties to an exhibit, DWL brought 34; by 1857, JME brought 123 and DWL 1051
- 1930's to present: S.L. Davenport, who later became a trustee, was a CCC worker concerned by how many old apple trees were being destroyed in Worcester County. He started keeping some on his farm in Grafton; in the late 1940's, WCHS president Myron Converse was looking for a "project of importance" for the WCHS to take on. Davenport suggested taking over the care of his orchard and filling in missing heirloom varieties; the WCHS created the Preservation Orchard, sought other older varieties and moved it to Old Sturbridge Village until Tower Hill was built but the WCHS maintained and operated it from the 1940's until present.
- 1950's: a deadly F4 tornado touched down in Worcester County on June 9, 1953 but most of the damage was in Worcester proper; the WCHS followed up by providing trees to replace those people had lost in their gardens.

WORCESTER TREE INITIATIVE

One group in Worcester connecting people to plants is Worcester Tree Initiative, a small non-profit organization that has been connected with Tower Hill since their conception in 2009. WTI was formed when Asian Longhorned Beetle was discovered in Worcester and the surrounding towns. The Tree Initiative began as a reforestation group, supporting the community as trees were removed in the Asian Longhorned Beetle eradication effort. Residents in the affected communities can receive free trees to replace the ones they lose through WTI's Free Tree Giveaway program. There was genuine anguish at the near complete deforestation of neighborhoods, reinforcing our understanding that people are deeply connected to their plants.

In the 8 years since Worcester Tree Initiative began this work great efforts have been made to replace every tree that gets removed in the ALB eradication effort. However, ALB is not the only factor in Worcester's deforestation. The city's canopy is aging and the city itself is becoming more dense. Accommodating cars, cyclists and pedestrians leaves little room for street trees in much of the most densely developed parts of the city, and even within the more suburban portions where there is more space the mature trees are dying and need to be replaced.



A GARDEN ON A HILL

Thirty-one years ago Worcester County Horticultural Society purchased land in the neighboring town of Boylston to create a botanic garden, a place where they could showcase extravagant varieties of plants and plan large gardens. Tower Hill Botanic Garden is now the main stem of the Worcester County Horticultural Society and it still strives to champion the mission to Connect People and Plants.

The Garden has grown prolifically in the past 30 years and the next 30 promise to be no exception. Tower Hill has visitors from around the globe gracing its halls, paths, and trails; it is a regional treasure. However in recent years the garden, set less than 20 minutes from the WCHS's ancestral home in Downtown Worcester has begun to feel disconnected from the city of which it was once an integral part.



TREES
for the CITY
TOWER HILL
BOTANIC GARDEN
Connecting
People and
Plants

PEOPLE AND PLANTS

WTI knows there is a strong need for a group to take up the cause of the city's urban forest. Research has shown that the urban forest offers immense benefits to people and to the cities in which they grow. They help to keep people and the whole city cool. They clean the air of polluting gases and dusts. They have been shown to be connected to better health in a multitude of ways from reduced rates of asthma and heat related illness to stress reduction, improved mental health, and faster recovery times from illness and injury. Trees can even improve business and reduce crime. In our high tech, fast paced world people need plants more than ever.

A GROWING CITY

The city has changed in many ways, industrially, commercially, demographically, and culturally. Once at the center of the Industrial Revolution, Worcester now finds itself as the home of some of the best health care institutions in the country. The city has an ethnically diverse mix of residents with deep roots and recent transplants.

In the years since the formation of the Botanic Garden and the subsequent shift in WCHS's focus to its work there Worcester's residents have not lost their love of plants. That inherent quality within people which draws them to nature lives on strongly in the city. Gardening programs, land trusts, and more recently a tree planting program have helped the people of the city to satiate their desire to be connected to plants.



PARALLEL MISSIONS

Both Tower Hill and Worcester Tree Initiative are seeking to Connect People to Plants and there is a lot of overlap in the ways we try to do this. Tower Hill offers educational programs at the garden for people of all interests and abilities. They teach people and guide people in their experience of plants in their gardens. The Botanic Garden offers a spectacular variety of beautifully crafted spaces with diverse plant groups all cohering into a wonderland of vegetative glory. They are creating communities of plant lovers through their membership program which offers people access not only to the gardens throughout the year and other various perks, but the opportunity to connect to other people with the same passions.

Worcester Tree Initiative similarly offers educational programs around tree planting, maintenance, and other topics. Their partnerships within the community have helped them to reach and connect youth in every grade and families in every neighborhood with plants. They are also creating a community of plant enthusiasts and civic activists through their Stewards in the Street volunteer tree care program. Several times a month a team of volunteers is called upon to help plant, inspect, or prune trees, depending on the season. The camaraderie within this group, all eager to make Worcester more vibrant and verdant and to make sure it's urban forest is healthy, is genuinely heartwarming.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP

It should be clear to see that these two organizations share a common cause and why it has been easy to come together under the same banner. In 2016 Worcester Tree Initiative became an independent program of Tower Hill Botanic Garden. This partnership offers great benefits to both groups. Tower Hill and WCHS gain a partner well established in the communities that have developed in Worcester in the past 30 years. They are able to connect to people with little to no knowledge of their gardens and find ways to connect them to plants. They also gain access to the many other groups within the city with whom WTI has connected, not just environmental groups but community development agencies, schools, and city officials. Tower Hill also gets to expand the scope of educational opportunities and resources they can offer to their members through WTI's expertise.

Worcester Tree Initiative gains a well established partner with many internal resources such as a large community of plant lovers, a well trained staff, and administrative assistance. They also get to have a larger platform from which they can advocate for the urban forest. By reaching a larger audience with their message Worcester Tree Initiative can harness more power to make positive change in the urban forest.



Tower Hill: Returning to the Community Where it Germinated.

Complimentary Missions



Expanding Audience Engagement



Bringing
horticultural
expertise into the
community



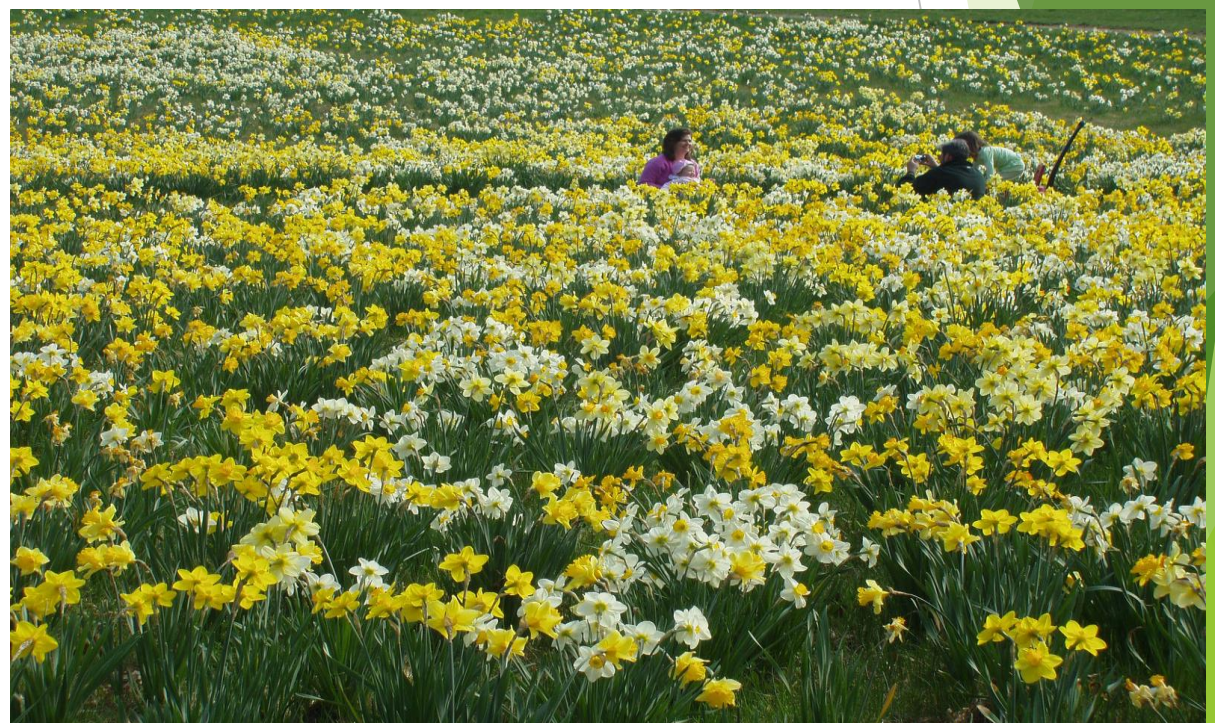
The Challenges

Blending Cultures

Informal



Structured



WORCESTER TREE INITIATIVE

TOWER HILL



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