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MISSION-BASED IDENTIFICATION OF GARDEN AUDIENCES

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The Atlanta Botanical Garden is a small urban Garden located just three miles from the city center in Midtown Atlanta. Since it was chartered in 1976 with a 50-year lease, it has occupied 30 acres adjacent to Piedmont Park, the most heavily used public park in the City. The Garden encompasses 15 acres of well-respected cultivated gardens, 15 acres of old growth woods and two acres for the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Children's Garden (1999), along with the Dorothy Chapman Fuqua Conservatory (1989), the new Fuqua Orchid Center (2002), Gardenhouse (1985), the administrative center, and Exhibit Hall (2002) that houses the Children's Learning Center. The Garden was organized by a grassroots group of citizens in the mid-1970s without benefit of a bequest or estate grounds, and is privately funded under the leadership of Mary Pat Matheson, executive director. Responsiveness to the surrounding community has always been its touchstone. Because of its proximity to downtown, the Garden is well situated and hosts a wide variety of public and private events. But the true nature of its audience arises from its mission statement, which is carried into every aspect of the Garden's operations.

Mission Statement

The Mission of the Atlanta Botanical Garden is to develop and maintain plant collections for display, education, research, conservation and enjoyment.



Figure 1. The Atlanta Botanical Garden.

By examining each facet of the mission by turn, it becomes easy to identify the Garden's audience.

Display

The beautiful grounds of the Garden, its plant collections, container plantings, demonstration gardens, hardscaping and water features provide a natural invitation to commercial landscapers, landscape architects, garden designers and design/build groups, an important professional component of the audience. For example, the Garden frequently extends "Southern hospitality" to the Southern Nursery Association (SNA), inviting them to put the Garden on its tour schedule for their annual conference participants. The Metro-Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association (MALTA) is invited to hold its monthly dinner meetings in the exhibition space known as Day Hall at no charge. Freelance garden writers and photographers who want to visit the Garden on a story, or to observe new introductions and to take advantage of the extensive plant labeling that streamlines their jobs, need only contact the Public Relations Department for free admission. Photographers, videographers and film-makers shoot both privately and on assignment. Although students are allowed to work for free depending on the workflow at the Garden, location fees for commercial photographers provide a source of revenue. Local television stations know the Garden welcomes members of the media. Public service announcements, such as the recently aired "Wednesday's Child," a network program highlighting two specific children available for adoption on their tour through the Children's Garden, are admitted free and Garden staff is provided for their assistance. Leads for Atlanta-based CNN segments are often taped here, and the Garden is thanked on-air or in their credits.

Education

Education is perhaps the most important aspect of the Garden's mission, and many segments of the population are addressed. A quarterly class schedule, published by the Education Department, is sent to the Garden's 10,000 members and provides dates, times and registration information on a wide variety of educational offerings. Garden members may take advantage of "members only" programs such as the monthly Q & A program "Gardening Month By Month" and receive discounts on all classes offered.

Direct-mail postcards detail events and speakers at day-long symposia offered spring and fall and are also sent to announce international speakers visiting ABG to present lectures for the Alston Lectures and Calhoun Lecture series.

Calendar Editors of Atlanta newspapers and electronic media are sent monthly calendars of classes and events for their calendar listings by the Marketing and Public Relations Department. Homeowners read about (and subsequently flock to) evening classes and short courses on subjects as varied as garden design and bee keeping.

Community college students enrolled in courses such as Plant Identification take advantage of the grounds and extensive plant collections. (For a number of years, ABG made a classroom available to Gwinnett Technical Institute for classes in Environmental Horticulture.)

Apart from adult education, an extensive education program for toddlers, children and youth ranges from curriculum-related school tours to Saturday outdoor amphitheater programs, and from Scouting badges to "Young Sprouts" and "Stroller Strut" activities for pre-schoolers. The Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Children's Garden opened in 1999 as a conscious effort to encourage families with young children to become Garden members. Although a 2-acre, \$3 million children's garden

may seem an extreme tactic to bring in an audience, it has paid big dividends in increased membership and repeat visitation. The Summer Environmental Day Camp typically fills through word of mouth, but it could be advertised at the Summer Camp Fairs held by several private schools in the city or in annual camp issue of *Atlanta Parent* magazine.

The Garden participates the Georgia Outdoor Classroom Council and hosts a symposium each fall for more than 300 teachers, an important way to introduce science teachers to the Garden. As a result, many teachers schedule field trips to the Garden or an outreach visit by the youth programs coordinator to their classrooms during the following school year.

A strong relationship with the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service and a central city location in Midtown combine to make the Garden the logical location for the metro-Atlanta Master Gardener Program. This produces a rich source of volunteers for the Garden and results in chiefly Master Gardeners manning the ABG Plant Hotline.

Volunteers, an essential component of the Garden, are drawn from a variety of additional sources including Public Service Announcements (PSAs either written for print or 30-second scripts for broadcast) sent to selected media during enrollment season, the quarterly newsletter, *Clippings*, and the aforementioned Master Gardener program. Under the guidance of the Volunteer Manager, docents are thoroughly trained to lead tours of all ages, and Senior Citizens and nursing home residents arrive in busloads alongside yellow school buses. The Garden is entirely wheelchair and stroller accessible. More than 600 volunteers are active at the Garden in every capacity, from outdoor gardening to Conservatory work to giving tours to office work.

Research

Although primarily not a research institution, important aspects of the Garden mission include plant and information trades and informal partnerships with fellow botanical gardens and arboreta. The scientific research community becomes an audience when Garden Conservationists are asked to supply stinking cedar (*Torreya taxifolia*) cuttings for cancer research. The results of a grafting program for fir species (*Abies*) grafted onto rootstock suitable for Southeastern U.S. soils, now underway, will be submitted for publication, attracting an additional audience.

Plant Societies are excellent audiences. Articles about the Garden's Southern Conifer garden and the Rose garden were published in the respective plant society *Journals*. An arrangement with the local chapter of The Herb Society of America allows them to hold their annual "Herb Education Day" at the Garden. The Atlanta Botanical Garden and the International Phalaenopsis Alliance (IPA) have entered into an agreement with the mutual goal of conservation of the entire genus of *Phalaenopsis*. Many species of the beautiful "moth orchid" are endangered due to habitat destruction around the world, and international members of the IPA have agreed to donate any *Phalaenopsis* species that the Garden would like to receive, eventually making it a safe haven for the entire collection of more than 60 species.

Several international seed collecting trips to Southeast Asia by Garden staff have resulted in plant trials of newly introduced ornamentals to Georgia and the Southeastern U.S., while swaps with other collectors in other parts of the country yield even more information. Green industry audiences are alerted through published announcements in the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA) newsletter as well as networking.

The Atlanta Botanical Garden hosted the 8th meeting of the Plant Conservation Committee of the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN-The World Conservation Union. Delegates from seven countries attended the two-day Species Survival Commission meetings in Atlanta on the way to the 2000 AABGA conference in South Carolina and the first-ever World Botanic Gardens Congress. They returned in 2004. The Committee and the Congress provided an invaluable exchange of information.

At the university level, in a new program beginning in 2005, post-doctoral candidates in microbiology from nearby Emory University will obtain hands-on experience in the new Ron Determann Tissue Culture Lab working on protocols for the propagation of native species orchids. A dialog between the organizations began after a Piedmont Park Conservancy roundtable discussion.

Extensive research into a new technology to support the growth of orchids native to high elevations (6-10,000 feet) around the world in "Hotlanta" has resulted in the unique prototype 'air washer' climate control system for the Fuqua Orchid Center (opened March 2002). This synthesis of conventional greenhouse heating and cooling, a fogging system and an 'air washer' from the textile industry, all controlled by custom-designed computer software, is the first of its kind in the world. Representatives from the Singapore Botanic Garden have visited ABG twice to take notes on the project.

Conservation

The Garden is renowned for its very active conservation program at both native and international levels. Bog and native plant restoration work stretches across five southeastern states and involves governmental and private environmental groups, native plant societies and private landowners, all members of the Garden audience. This work was recognized by many U.S. Fish and Wildlife Grants, and featured in popular consumer magazines such as *Southern Living* (April, 2001) and television shows (*The Natural South*, Turner South, 2003 and 2005), stimulating a lot of dialog. The Garden is a founding member of the Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance and staff members participate in the many related conservation organizations, enlarging the Garden audience. Work with *Torreya taxifolia* or Stinking Cedar native to the Florida panhandle and South Georgia, Garden researchers have grown more than 3,000 indexed plants to replant and extend their distribution beyond the original range where they are being destroyed by fungus. *Torreya* is related to *Taxus*, and both are proving important for cancer research.

Internationally, the Garden's relationship with a sister organization, Maquipucuna Reserve in Ecuador, produces international understanding, internship programs and an improved standard of living in Ecuador. Interns return from Atlanta with options to the local slash-and-burn economy. Threatened palms from tropical islands, tropical carnivorous pitcher plants (*Nepenthes*), and Madagascar Spiny Forest plants (*Dididereaceae*).

Exhibits of poison frogs from South America help to preserve unique genetic pools while educating the American public about these beautiful endangered animals. Governments of Central and South American countries where the frogs originate, sanction the exhibits and thus become an audience linked by conservation. A grant from Queens University in Northern Ireland provides resources for additional staff and frog lab equipment.

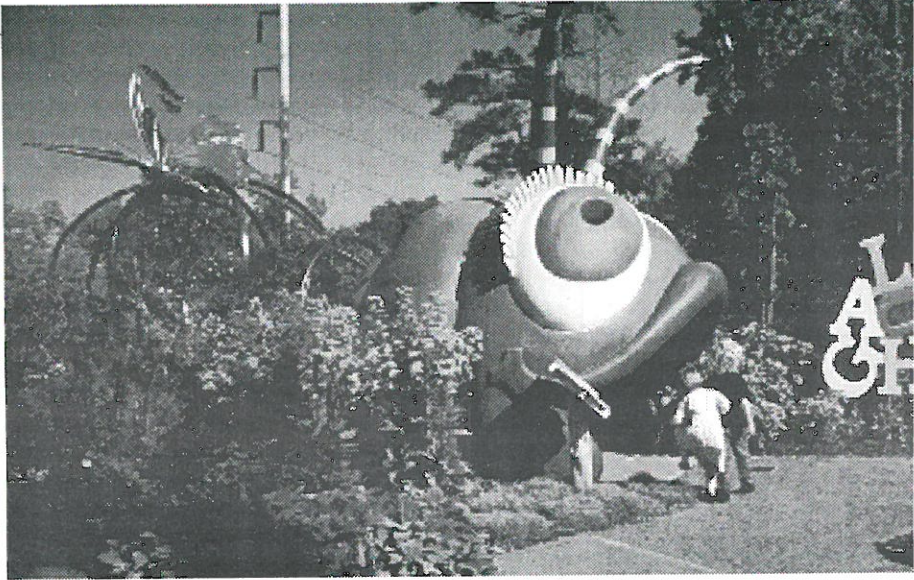


Figure 2. A little whimsy keeps kids interested.

Enjoyment

For just plain fun, tangentially-related exhibits and exhibitions bring first-time visitors into the Garden. TREEmendous TREEhouses featured 11 life-sized, fantasy treehouses placed in the Woodland Shade garden and explored by approximately 150,000 visitors in 2003. *Chihuly in the Garden*, a display of more than 50 colorful glass sculptures by artist Dale Chihuly throughout the Garden, brought in 200,000 new visitors in 2004. The Asian Cultural Experience features 17 different Asian nationalities, with dancing, calligraphy, food, and arts. During October scarecrows abound, in the month-long “Scarecrows in the Garden” exhibit, submitted by local artists and businesses, and judged by community judges. Carolers and crafts enliven the well-publicized “Holiday in the Garden.” The general public is urged to visit the Garden year-round, and to this end, “Orchid Daze” and “Orchid Nights” make use of the unique resource available in the Fuqua Orchid Center during winter months, when the outside gardens are resting, but the orchids are in full bloom.

Artists drawing and painting from life lend a *je ne sais quois* to the outdoor gardens. On a limited basis, the Garden sends adult passes and a packet of information to schools or other non-profit organizations requesting donations for their fundraisers, and reaps a crossover audience from the requesting organization.

Monthly event schedules and colorful rack cards about exhibits are sent to more than 100 local hotels, making it easy for Concierges to direct conventioners and visitors to the Garden, via both public and private transportation systems. During the 1996 Olympics, guests from every corner of the world signed in.

In a successful attempt to attract young professionals, “Cocktails in the Garden” pairs a cocktail and a plant on the last Wednesday of each month. For example, 500 young adults came to network and relax with “Hydrangeas and Highballs” or “Mag-

nolias and Mannhattans,” invited by original e-vite sent to their e-mailboxes.

Those attending the dynamic Southeastern Flower Show (SFS), largest in the southeast drawing 40,000+ attendees each February, also become members of the Garden audience when they visit the Garden. Accredited Flower Show Judges from all over the country are bussed to the over in vans to attend a class and take a tour. There is a discount ticket arrangement between the Garden and the SFS to encourage crossover participation.

The Garden does targeted paid advertising, primarily in cultural and leisure publications, and tracks these ads with dollars-off coupons that are turned in at Admissions. The Garden also partners with arts organizations to achieve a broader audience base. For example, when the High Museum of Art staged an Impressionism exhibition, a map of plants similar to those growing at the Atlanta Botanical Garden was created and distributed at both venues, and the Garden is a strong member of the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Conclusion

In a mission-driven, market-sensitive milieu, the audience is the indispensable other half of the equation. More than 200,000 individuals and groups visit the Atlanta Botanical Garden each year and are served in a multitude of ways, but every aspect of the Garden’s program is guided by its Mission statement, resulting in a unified message for the multi and various members of the ABG audience. The personal connection between the audience and the Garden’s Mission is what keeps the Atlanta Botanical Garden strong and responsive.