



July 1, 2021

Honorable April N.M. Baskin
Chair, Erie County Legislature
Legislator, 2nd District
792 E. Delavan
Buffalo, N.Y. 14215

Dear Legislator Baskin,

I would like to express that the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Society, its Board of Directors and staff are committed to creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment for all who experience the wonders of the natural world. The Botanical Gardens welcomes all visitors and is committed to creating an environment free of discrimination and harassment where all individuals are treated with respect. The Botanical Gardens strives to ensure that its collection, facilities, and programming are inclusive and accessible in order to provide a successful and engaging experience for all audiences.

Over the past few years, we have made strides to enhance our commitment to become more diverse, equitable and inclusive. As an attachment to this letter, I have included highlights of the Botanical Gardens' efforts. We can and will do more.

More recently and specifically, the Botanical Gardens is in the process of creating a DEI committee comprised of community members, Botanical Gardens' board members and staff. The initial meeting of the organizing group took place on July 1, 2021. Shatorah Donovan, Chief Diversity Office for the City of Buffalo, provided guidance and direction to the group on the steps necessary to make thoughtful and informed decisions moving forward. We have engaged a diverse group of individuals to create and activate this committee. Additionally, recognizing the need for professional guidance, an outside facilitator will be engaged to ensure the committee conversations are conducted with professionalism and care. The Board of Directors will vote at its next meeting on July 14, 2021 to create a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, within its bylaws, thereby officially committing to moving this process forward.

The Botanical Gardens is also currently working on an updated strategic plan that identifies DEI not only as a specific goal within the plan but as a lens in which we should look through to enhance our organization as a whole. Benchmarks will be included in the plan to measure our DEI progress and successes. The DEI committee will ensure our diversity, equity and inclusion practices and policies are prominent within the plan and the committee will be the working group to champion those goals and specific initiatives.

In order for the Botanical Gardens to be successful, we believe our staff should represent the community in which we live. Staff from diverse backgrounds brings creativity, imagination and vision as we grow and expand. To more fully diversify our staff, employment opportunities are being promoted in underserved and minority communities and will continue into the future. The Botanical Gardens expansion plan will require many additional and diverse staff members between 2021-2024. As of June 30, 2021, there are currently four open positions at the Botanical Gardens and we hope to begin to further diversify our staff this year.

Not only should our staff represent the community in which we live, our exhibits should as well. The Botanical Gardens is making a commitment to diversify our exhibits and community collaborations to create opportunities for urban artists to highlight minority communities. Art and gardens go hand and hand and we have a vision to partner with the WNY Urban Arts Collective to add art exhibits throughout the Botanical Gardens and within our Arcangel Gallery.

Later this summer, we plan to announce our commitment to become more diverse, equitable and inclusive by highlighting the work we have already done and the exciting plans we have for the future to further those efforts. We also plan to announce the final DEI committee roster, the next steps for that committee, some highlights from our strategic plan, our commitment to diversify our staff and board of directors, and specific diverse programs, events and exhibits we have planned for the future.

The Botanical Gardens is committed to incorporating enhanced diversity, equity and inclusion practices throughout the entire organization and those practices will remain a top priority. There is great and thoughtful energy behind what we have accomplished and what we plan to do. We are excited to make positive social change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Swarts". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Swarts
President/CEO

cc: Miche Needham, Botanical Gardens Board President
Robert Lowery, Botanical Gardens Board Member



Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Society, Inc.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Small and Large Steps Over the Last Few Years

- Discussed the importance of creating a DEI committee with the entire staff - January 2020 (this was put on pause due to COVID-19). The new committee will begin work in July 2021
- Incorporated this extremely important topic into every aspect of our newest strategic plan. The strategic plan will be adopted end of summer 2021 and will cover 2021-2024.
- Updating our Marketing Plan in 2021 to align with the strategic plan and our IDEA initiatives.
- Introduced an DEI/Accessibility Statement - 2019
 - The Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens welcomes all visitors and is committed to creating an environment free of discrimination and harassment where all individuals are treated with respect. The Botanical Gardens strives to ensure that its collection, facilities, and programming are inclusive and accessible in order to provide a successful and engaging experience for all audiences.
 - Added this statement to our printed Visitor Guide and Map that is given to all visitors at the Botanical Gardens – 2021
 - Added this statement to all of our mass emails - 2021
- Made a concerted and thoughtful effort to feature a more diverse representation of humans on all printed and digital materials - 2019-2021
- Added “all are welcome” signs on doors - Installed Fall 2020
- Created a partnership with Gerard Place to provide over 1,000 pounds of fresh produce between 2019 and 2021 (*2019 press release included below*)
- Provided School Grant Programs for Buffalo Public and Charter Schools & Lackawanna Schools
 - 4,663 students participated in our grant funded school programs onsite and virtually – 2018-2021
 - Our Grant Funded School Programs are for K-8 classrooms in the Buffalo and Lackawanna Public and Charter School Systems. Our programs are aligned to the Common Core State Standards, NYS P-12 Science Learning Standards and NYS Elementary and Intermediate Level Science Core Curriculum.
- Posted for open positions/employment to broader more diverse outlets within our community
- Created a partnership with the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning to focus on Universal Design throughout the expansion plan.
- Wedding post featuring LGBTQ+ couple - June 2020
- Specific Pride Logo - Buffalo Pride Week Logo- August 2020
- Pride Week Video - Pride Month June 2020
- Wedding promo featured LGBTQ+ couple - February 2021
- Pride Night at Lumagination with the Pride Center of WNY - February 2020 & 2021
- #BlackOutTuesday Post - June 2020
- #Juneteenth Post - June 2020 and 2021
- Racial Injustice Post - June 2020
 - The Buffalo Botanical Gardens expresses support to those protesting against racism, violence, and injustice experienced by people of color in our country. We strive to be a place where all people feel welcome, connected to and inspired by plants and the natural world. In solidarity with those who are working for justice and peace, we pledge

to provide welcoming and safe access to our conservatory and gardens for all of our visitors, especially our visitors of color.

- MLK day Post - Feb 2020 and 2021
- Black History Month Post & Partnership - Feb 2021
 - In honor of [#BlackHistoryMonth](#), we'd like to shine a spotlight on [@conquerthesoil](#) for the incredible work she has done and is doing as both a horticulturist and historian. Abra Lee has been digging deep since 2010 to uncover some of the untold and lost stories of important Black figures in horticulture history and is working on releasing a book. We will continue to share out some important content from Abra in our story highlight. Swipe up in our first story to check out "The Invincible Garden Ladies" presentation to learn about historic Black women in horticulture. If you don't follow Abra already, we encourage you to check out her page, website, and give her a follow and join her journey to discover the meaning behind [#ConquerTheSoil](#). [#BlackHistoryIsAmericanHistory](#) [#BlackExcellence](#) [#Horticulture](#)
- Hired a Black Woman-Owned Business as a virtual class instructor - 2020
- Featured students from BPS 31 Harriet Ross Tubman - 1st Grade to highlight our educational programs - April 2021
- Participated in the Buffalo Public School's Saturday Academy - 2019-2021
- The Botanical Gardens provides learning opportunities for visitors of all ages and abilities. Educational programs and field trips can be adapted for students with disabilities.
- Participated in a statewide accessibility webinar through I LOVE NY and made a commitment to assess and improve our overall accessibility.
- Participated in WNET Kid Fest - April 2021
- Partnership with Explore and More to table at one of their events - 2019-2021
- Participated in the national Blue Star Museums - 2012-present
 - [Blue Star Museums](#) is a collaboration among the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families, the Department of Defense, and museums across America are offering free admission to the nation's active-duty military personnel including those currently serving in the United States Military - Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard as well as Active Duty and Reservists, National Guardsman (regardless of status), U.S. Public Health Commissioned Corps, NOAA Commissioned Corps, and up to five family members.
- Participated in the Arts Access program through Arts Services Inc. - 2016-present
 - [Arts Services Inc.'s Arts Access](#) program aims to break the barriers of inaccessibility to the region's arts and culture sector. These barriers often include money, transportation, and knowledge of events. They partner with local theaters, galleries, and other arts and culture organizations to offer free or reduced-cost opportunities to low-income Western New York residents and their families. Arts Services Inc. envisions a region where anyone can engage with the arts.
- Created a partnership with Autism Services of WNY for a Sensory Night at Lumagination - 2019-2021
- Working to discover best method of using closed captioning on promotional videos and potentially online classes.



The Botanical Gardens and Gerard Place Collaborate to Feed a Need

For Immediate Release - Aug 22, 2019

Buffalo, NY - The Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Society, Inc. installed a new outdoor Eco Garden in the spring of 2019. The Eco Garden fulfills part of the Botanical Gardens' current strategic plan that outlines diversifying their program of green initiatives. With funding support from the Josephine Goodyear Foundation, PlantWNY, and private donors, the Eco Garden has come to fruition and now produces a large harvest of fresh vegetables and herbs that are donated to a local organization, Gerard Place.

The Eco Garden features a wide variety of vegetables and herbs, composting, vermiculture (an organic process of garden composting using worms), rain barrels and more. The garden is environmentally friendly and produces nutritional food, free of pesticides. Gerard Place provides housing for homeless single parents and their families and empowers those parents through education, employment, vocational training, life skills classes and counseling. Gerard Place has a huge need for fresh vegetables and herbs for the underserved population they assist on the East Side of Buffalo. Gerard Place is located in Bailey-Delevan neighborhood which is considered a food desert due to the absence of grocery stores within a five-mile radius. This results in a lack of healthy fruits and vegetables in this community which has very serious consequences with health and wellness in this community. To date, 180 pounds of fresh vegetables and herbs have been donated to Gerard Place from the Eco Garden.

"The Botanical Gardens is thrilled to collaborate with Gerard Place for the first time. The Eco Garden is a project our team has been working on for over two years and it is exciting to see this important project and garden come together. Not only are we expanding important green initiatives at the Botanical Gardens, we also created a wonderful collaboration with Gerard Place and are helping to fill a need in our community." David Swarts, President/CEO of the Buffalo Botanical Gardens.

"We are very excited to partner with the Botanical Gardens to help ensure that families that come to our site will have the opportunity to take home healthy options for their meals. In addition to this initiative, we will implement health and nutrition classes for the community using this food and showing people how to cook, clean and store the fruits and vegetables. The food will be used in our dining hall which helps to feed people dinner, in our monthly food express line with our partnership with the Food Bank and we will offer the food to our Children's Academy parents who live in this community where food insecurity is their primary concern. We are so grateful to our community partners like the Botanical Gardens who will help us address this very serious issue." David Zapfel, President/CEO of Gerard Place.

For more information about Gerard Place, visit their website at gerardplace.org. Gerard Place's mission is to strengthen the community as it empowers individuals and families toward self-sufficiency by providing housing, supportive services, community education and outreach.

The Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Society Inc., a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization with a mission to inspire curiosity and connect people to the natural world through its historic living museum.