



# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

DELAWARE BOTANIC GARDENS AT PEPPER CREEK



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FOR THE DELAWARE BOTANIC GARDENS, 2014 was a banner year.

The year's most significant event was the signing of a renewable ninety-nine-year lease with the Sussex County Land Trust for the 37.5-acre garden site. Through the far-sightedness and leadership of the Land Trust, this topographically significant site had already been acquired for preservation. The Trust has leased this property—valued at more than \$1 million—to the Delaware Botanic Gardens for \$1 a year as a manifestation of its dedication to improving the quality of life in Sussex County. This lease has accelerated our overall timeline, given that the search for and acquisition of a site has taken some botanic gardens ten years or more.

Another important accomplishment was the creation and expansion of our Advisory Council. This group of distinguished leaders, led by our state's First Lady, Carla Markell, has been the source of great support and continued guidance. Recent additions to the Advisory Council have included Nelson Schaffer, executive vice president of Pennoni Associates; David Small, secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control; Ronnie Burkle, corporate chef of SoDel Concepts, one of Delmarva's leading businesses; and Rodney Robinson, one of the most respected and renowned landscape architects in the region.

Two short back stories about our two newest advisers will demonstrate the growing recognition of the Botanic Gardens project and its importance to Delmarva. A few weeks before his tragic death in India, Matt Haley of SoDel Concepts had agreed to join our Advisory Council and expressed his interest in the Children's Garden and children's education programs the garden plans to offer. As a manifestation of SoDel's determination to continue Haley's philanthropic interests, Scott Kammerer, SoDel's new president, asked Ronnie Burkle, the company's new corporate chef, to fulfill Haley's commitment to join the Advisory Council. Burkle represents one of Delaware's most honored companies, while adding a new generational perspective to the council.

Rodney Robinson is a leader in the creation and restoration of some of America's most beautiful public gardens, including those at the governor's mansion in Dover and at Nemours in Wilmington. He was the Delaware Botanic Gardens' guest speaker in fall 2014, when he was invited to join the Advisory Council. Robinson has subsequently given generously of his time and experience to sharpen the focus and flow of the DBG design. His significant improvements will help make the Delaware Botanic Gardens a special place and will enable us to turn the garden into reality. Our site plan is now co-branded by Rodney Robinson Landscape Architects, Inc., and Pennoni Associates Inc. This is truly a Dream Team!

During 2014 the Delaware Botanic Gardens also completed an extensive search for a fundraising consultant, retaining Cam Yorkston so that we can begin a serious campaign to raise funds to "Open the Garden Gates." Through the generosity of our members and supporters, we reached a wonderful milestone at the end of 2014: our bank account hit \$100,000. This was achieved using a series of "Dine and Donate" events at great local restaurants; the annual Farm Dinner at Good Earth Market and Organic Farm (featuring a matching-pledge challenge by Chuck Colman that raised \$32,000); and an end-of-the-year appeal, "Tis the Season for Giving"; plus a growing number of paid members. Despite these successes, unless we begin to raise significant funds, the dream of a botanic garden on Delmarva will remain just a dream. We are proud that we have a contract with Yorkston to consult on and lead our development efforts. He is a renowned fundraiser who has served as a professional development officer and consultant for forty years, with extensive experience serving clients throughout Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore.

During 2014 the Delaware Botanic Gardens also prepared an independent economic impact analysis to assess the costs and benefits of building such a garden in Sussex County. Conducted by a nationally recognized economic assessment firm, Rockport Analytics, the study validated our visitation estimates and projected the significant economic value that a botanic garden will bring to Sussex and Delaware. For example, initial-phase construction will add \$4 million to the Delaware GDP and support seventy local jobs. Once the garden is open, its operations will add \$21.7 million to the Delaware GDP and create an average of 118 local jobs. Ancillary visitor spending initiated by the garden will contribute \$10.2 million to the Delaware GDP and add about forty new jobs. The Delaware Botanic Gardens will not only be a thing of beauty but also a viable economic contributor to our region and our state.

Another example of the growing recognition of the Delaware Botanic Gardens occurred recently when it was honored to be asked to participate with one of the leaders of public gardens, Don

Rakow of Cornell. In the coming semester, Dr. Rakow and his students will collaborate with DBG to research key issues that will enable us to move forward more rapidly on our plant collection policy and our Children's Garden and education program. Being associated with Dr. Rakow and the Cornell program is a great boost to our credibility and will give a strong intellectual foundation to our efforts.



Working within the limits of our pre-construction phase, board members and volunteers have braved the weather and the wilds of the site's ten acres of woodlands to start some rudimentary cleaning and underbrush clearing. This will help the professionals who are doing the wetlands delineation and the topographic surveys gain full access to the woods. We have discovered the hidden beauty of the woodlands and,

unfortunately, a surprising amount of junk that has been dumped in the woods over the years.

Our board members (who also currently serve as the staff), our Advisory Council, and our volunteers are all donating thousands of hours of time and talent. Companies such as Pennoni Associates, Rodney Robinson Landscape Architects, George & Lynch, and the law firms of Baird Mandalas Brockstedt LLC and Tunnell & Raysor P.A. have all continued to bring their professional skills to the project pro bono.

So as we start 2015, the Delaware Botanic Gardens has an exciting site plan designed by one of the region's most renowned landscape architects. It has the continued leadership of Mark Davidson and Pennoni. It has started the serious business of fundraising with a professional who has an exceptional track record. It has begun preliminary preparation of the major feature of our "Open the Garden Gates" event, the Woodland Gardens.

Together we have achieved a great deal since the Delaware Botanic Gardens was founded in 2012. With continued support, we look forward to even greater progress and success in 2015.