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Revitalizing Arboriculture Education at the Morris Arboretum

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Revitalizing Arboriculture Education at the Morris Arboretum

Title: **Revitalizing Arboriculture Education at the Morris Arboretum**

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Date: **April 2008**

Abstract:

In an effort to enhance the Arboretum's professional educational offerings, which will improve the care of trees in our area and will enhance the Morris Arboretum's name recognition, reputation, visitation, and revenue, this project focuses on expanding and reinvigorating our arboriculture classes, lectures and symposia. In particular, the project focus will be on professional enhancement for arborists and other professionals including landscapers, landscape architects and building professionals with an interest in preserving trees during construction.

In order to assess and invigorate the arboriculture education program, first, I looked at what we have offered over the past three years. I looked at the class offerings, symposia and lectures, how much we spent to offer these educational sessions, how many people attended (vs. capacity) and the revenue achieved.

Following a thorough assessment of past and current offerings, I looked at what is offered at area arboreta, botanical gardens, universities and other institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

In an effort to enhance the Arboretum's professional educational offerings, which will improve the care of trees in our area and will enhance the Morris Arboretum's name recognition, reputation, visitation and revenue, this project focuses on expanding and reinvigorating our arboriculture classes, lectures and symposia. In particular, the project focus will focus on professional enhancement for arborists and other professionals including landscapers, landscape architects and building professionals with an interest in preserving trees during construction.

In order to assess and invigorate the arboriculture education program, first, I looked at what we have offered over the past three years. I considered the class offerings, symposia and lectures, how much we spent to offer these educational sessions, how many people attended (vs. capacity) and the revenue achieved.

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METHODS AND FINDINGS

I searched for existing classes in a 50 miles radius of the Morris Arboretum. Classroom courses are listed in appendix.

1) Completed an education inventory/assessment

I looked at classes currently offered at the Morris Arboretum, and classes offered regionally to assess what is needed, and to determine an appropriate fee structure. Area tree professionals and Arboretum staff were interviewed to determine local needs in arboriculture education.

2) **Made recommendations** for possible classes to offer based on findings from inventory/assessment, and suggested next steps and for further investigation/consideration

3) Estimated budgets for ongoing arboricultural education and marketing

Several issues were considered in my research:

1. Number of participants expected
2. Budgets (past and proposed for the future) for instructors (local, visiting and overhead), including preparation time by Arboretum staff, including Bob Wells, Jason Lubar and Jan McFarlan.
3. Marketing, what we've done in the past, what might work in the future.
4. Audience(s): Arborists, other tree professionals, government officials, EPA, land managers, ground supervisors, landscape architects, other arboreta and botanical garden staff and other trades (construction engineers, architects, etc)

A. Other arboreta, botanical gardens and university programs, including but not limited to: Rutgers University, Longwood Gardens, Penn State Agricultural Extension

B. Area arborists and tree professionals (contact information will be stored for future reference)

C. Morris staff experts including: Education Department, Events, Outreach Arborists and other arborist staff & interns

D. Budgets

Interviews: I interviewed tree professionals consisting of arborists, urban foresters, arboriculture educators and others to assess area needs.

Classes offered: In addition, classes are offered at the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society (Tree Tenders training, in particular) at the Barnes Foundation and at Mount Cuba. However, most of those classes target homeowners and hobbyists, as opposed to tree professionals. By far, Rutgers University's Professional Landscape Program offers the most professional level classes related to arboriculture, landscape business management, and other classes about soils and horticulture. Rutgers classes are also expensive, when compared to other offerings in the area.

Classes to Consider Offering: According to arborists interviewed, proper pruning techniques need to be focused on for hands-on workers, and business management/pricing should be offered for business owners.

Class times offered/needed – most professional level classes are offered during weekdays. While one business owner I talked to suggested that classes should be offered on weekends so as not to take workers away from weekday jobs, others thought that it would be difficult to get hands-on workers to agree to take classes on weekends/evenings.

While business tends to be slow in the winter, many migrant workers return to their home countries during the slow months, so basic level classes, particularly Spanish language classes, may not be effective offered in the winter, so should probably be offered either very late in season or very early (less busy late, but information will be fresh on their minds if taught early).

Morris Arboretum marketing

Currently we offer a full course catalog sent out to Arboretum members and to others on our mailing list twice a year. We also have a separate brochure for professional education that is sent to an additional list. We have obtained a mailing list for landscape architects and engineers in order to test that market for professional education, particularly when related to protecting trees during construction and other topics of value for those professions.

In addition, we have obtained the mailing list for the International Society for Arboriculture and have, for the first time, mailed out course brochures to that list.

Partnerships can be useful in marketing – share lists and resources in general.

Advertising in the Penn-Del Arborist, the publication for our regional chapter of the ISA's publication should be considered. Additionally, advertising in the local chapter of the AIA and possibly in the area publication for the Professional Society of Engineers.

Other organizations to look into: TCIA; NJ Chapter ISA; Tree Service; NJ Shade Tree Federation

Advertising information for the American Society of Landscape Architects, PA Chapter, AIA Philadelphia, and the Penn-Del Arborist is included in the appendix, in the hard copy of this document, at the conclusion of this report.

Current marketing – catalog. Also look at building professionals, Landscape Architects and engineers depending on the course being offered.

DISCUSSION

We have partnered with several different area agencies, and each partnership is different in terms of duties, responsibilities and expertise. This has worked well for us, but has been so variable that it is difficult to make any generalizations based on our experience. Current partnerships have included other botanical organizations like the Scott Arboretum, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, International Society for Arboriculture and the Fairmount Park Commission. Additionally, educational institutions like Villanova University, the University of Pennsylvania and Penn State Agricultural Extension Service have partnered with us.

Currently, the existing course evaluation form is not distributed to arboriculture class participants. I recommend revising the form to better meet our needs, and distributing the form at the culmination of every class taught. The evaluation could provide valuable insight not only into how to improve existing classes, but opinions could be elicited on classes that participants would like to see offered.

To see if giving additional courses is feasible, the Morris Arboretum must consider costs and revenue. Costs of education at other venues; we want to be competitive and earn revenue for the Arboretum and to appeal to the widest audience. If we charge more, we have a chance at earning more revenue, but run the risk of discouraging participation.

Budget Issues

In the past, almost all Morris Arboretum professional education courses have been taught by staff onsite. Therefore, costs were kept down and were largely limited to advertising and to lunches and overhead (electricity, printing, etc.).

We are considering bringing in more outside speakers in order to attract a larger audience, and to justify more significant fees, which will increase revenue. In addition, our space does not accommodate many more than 65 people at a maximum. Outside speakers will increase speaker fees, and will include travel and accommodation costs. At the same time, speakers of note can command a more significant fee than in-staff instructors can.

Eventually, our new horticulture center will be completed that will give us space for much larger audiences. In the meantime, we must either limit participation, or use another facility, which will increase cost. Some options for facilities we have used in the past are: Scott Arboretum, Villanova University and the University of Pennsylvania. Each space has advantages and disadvantages in terms of convenience, accommodations, expense and other matters.

Advantages to using other spaces include: more space and sharing planning and organizing with the hosting organization. A disadvantage is that it costs more, we must travel to get there, and attendees don't enjoy the beauty of the Morris Arboretum. Once our horticulture center is complete, we can use the presence of participants at the Arboretum to highlight our wonderful gardens and natural areas. Each alternate venue has challenges associated with it: Scott Arboretum is a distance away, the University of Pennsylvania is in the city so parking can be a challenge and many don't like traveling into the city for a conference, and Villanova is also not convenient for some.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Next Summer/fall – offer full day symposium on oaks with well-known author, discussions about bacterial leaf scorch, oak identification with either Ken LeRoy or Tony Aiello, etc. Also, think about inviting well-known tree professionals and scientists. People like Allan Armitage and Michael Dirr and others could attract a large audience, brand the Arboretum and get our name out there as the place to hear from people who really know about trees. Expand class offerings to include multi-day woody plant identification course, tree safety, business management/estimating, etc. and other related courses. Focus on higher level courses for ISA certified arborists and tree experts in general, as opposed to field tree workers and climbers.

Consider speaker circuit with international tree related experts. Partner with Scott Arboretum and other area botanical gardens and arboreta to bring in speakers to strengthen partnerships. Offer seminars with outside speakers of note to draw a significant audience. We should consider expanding partnerships to include Chanticleer and Rutgers University.

Research offering a multi-week short course for tree foremen, possibly offer a tree foreman certification course. Several arborists have expressed a dearth in knowledgeable middle-management tree workers, who are adept at arboriculture practices, management and client communication. Offer certificate programs in identification, culture and care of trees – these courses have been offered at Rutgers for many years, and have been successful in attracting a significant number of class participants, primarily landscape workers and tree professionals.

Continuing education units are important to both individuals taking the classes, and to managers who want to send staff. Make CEU offerings a priority, and market the classes as such. In addition, consider offering ISA certification exam preparation courses. While these classes may be more introductory than the direction we're seeking, we may not want to rule out basic level classes – there are so many people doing the actual tree work who could benefit from this education.

Explore offering courses in Philadelphia and surrounding municipalities for municipal arborists and others for whom that would be more convenient than coming to our location. Also explore offering online courses in the future.

Develop a comprehensive marketing plan. Include organizations and contact information to market to the audience, which should include arborists (& other tree professionals), builders, landscape architects, government agencies, borough managers, engineers, grounds managers,

golf course managers and others. Produce postcards, flyers and other types of marketing materials for difference types of classes for different audiences. Experiment with buying mailing lists. Keep track of responses for different types of marketing by asking how respondents heard about the classes. Advertise classes offered on our website, and research other websites to post class announcements.

TABLES

Education Charts

The following courses have been offered at The Morris Arboretum over the past three years.

| | | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Fall '07 | Indiv Arb training | Selecting & Planting | Pruning decid. trees | Refining Climbing | Hazard Inspection | Maintaining tree health. |
| Spring '07 | Pruning Shrubs | Selecting & planting | Practical Rigging & mech. Advantage | | | |
| Fall '06 | | | Pruning decid. trees | Refining Climbing | Hazard Inspection | Maintaining tree health. |
| Spring '06 | Pruning Shrubs | Selecting & planting | Practical Rigging & mech. Advantage | Construction tree Protection | | |
| Fall '05 | | | Pruning decid. trees | Refining Climbing | Hazard Inspection | Maintaining tree health. |
| Spring '05 | Pruning Shrubs | Selecting & planting | | Construction tree Protection | | Fertilizers & plant health |

The following classes have been offered at area botanical gardens and universities.

Classes offered

| Course | Class hours | Cost | Cost/hour | Institution |
|---|--------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Intro to Plant ID | 13 | 395 \$ | 30.38 | Rutgers |
| Growing Ornamentals | 6.5 | 195 \$ | 30.00 | Rutgers |
| Soil/plant Relationships | 19.5 | 395 \$ | 20.26 | Rutgers |
| Intro to Pruning | 3 | 175 \$ | 58.33 | Rutgers |
| Advanced Pruning | 6.5 | 195 \$ | 30.00 | Rutgers |
| Basics of plant Material for Landscape Use | 38.5 | 795 \$ | 20.65 | Rutgers |
| IPM | 22 | | | Rutgers |
| Professional Parks Maintenance | 22.5 | 395 \$ | 17.56 | Rutgers |
| Hazardous Tree ID | 6.5 | 245 \$ | 37.69 | Rutgers |
| Climbing & Rigging | 13 | 395 \$ | 30.38 | Rutgers |
| Best Management/ornamentals & shade trees | | | | Rutgers |
| Pruning, Cabling & Bracing | 6.5 | 245 \$ | 37.69 | Rutgers |
| Planting & Construction Site: Tree Pres & Remediation | 6.5 | 245 \$ | 37.69 | Rutgers |
| Plant Health Care & Prescription Fert | 6.5 | 245 \$ | 37.69 | Rutgers |
| Municipal Shade Tree Management | 7 | 245 \$ | 35.00 | Rutgers |
| Everyday Spanish for Contractors | 13 | 395 \$ | 30.38 | Rutgers |
| Water Management and Drainage | 7 | 195 \$ | 27.86 | Rutgers |
| Basics of Landscape Design | 35 | 845 \$ | 24.14 | Rutgers |
| Residential Landscape Renovation | 3 | 95 \$ | 31.67 | Rutgers |
| Principles and Practice of Landscape Design | 18 | 495 \$ | 27.50 | Rutgers |
| Low Maintenance Plants: Woody and Herbaceous | 6.5 | 195 \$ | 30.00 | Rutgers |
| Beds & Borders Seminar | 13 | 395 \$ | 30.38 | Rutgers |
| Landscape Lighting | 9.5 | 395 \$ | 41.58 | Rutgers |
| Water Gardens | 6.5 | 245 \$ | 37.69 | Rutgers |
| Irrigation Systems: Design and Installation | 28 | 695 \$ | 24.82 | Rutgers |
| Pest Management of Ornamental Landscape Plants | 6.5 | 195 \$ | 30.00 | Rutgers |
| Pesticide Safety for the Landscape Contractor | 6.5 | 195 \$ | 30.00 | Rutgers |

| | | | | |
|---|----|-----|----------|-------------------|
| Growing Smart: Building Your Landscape Business | 7 | 245 | \$ 35.00 | Rutgers |
| Estimating Landscape Proposals | 18 | 595 | \$ 33.06 | Rutgers |
| | | | \$ 31.59 | Rutgers |
| Evergreens | 12 | 159 | | Longwood |
| Pest ID Walk | 3 | 79 | | Longwood |
| Plant disease ID walk | 3 | 79 | | Longwood |
| Deciduous Flowering Shrubs | | 179 | | Longwood |
| Management of Woody Ornamentals - Arborist Short Course | 32 | 200 | | Extension Service |
| PennDel ISA Symposium | 16 | 175 | | ISA - penndel |

APPENDICES

Marketing

AIA Philadelphia advertising guidelines

The Penn-Del Arborist advertising guidelines

American Society of Landscape Architects PA chapter's Calendar of Events