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Learning the Art of Organization: Publicizing and Assisting with the Planning of the 2003 Invasive Plant Conference

Title: **Learning the Art of Organization: Publicizing and Assisting with the Planning of the 2003 Inasive Plant Conference**

Author: **Allison Krueger, Education Intern**

Date: **March 2003**

Abstract:

I chose for my intern project to assist in planning the Invasive Plants Conference 2003. Specifically I am working on publicizing and promoting the conference. My supervisor is Jan McFarlan the education coordinator. I also work with the members of the Invasive Plant Conference Planning Committee, which includes a collaboration of people from different organizations who are dedicated to the cause of preventing the further spread of invasive plants. My goal was to achieve as many advertising locations as possible. These targets included everything from listserves to magazines and newsletters (and many other places as well). The advertising was done through the creation of a press release and calendar listing, which I wrote with help from the Arboretum's Marketing Department. I would contact possible advertising targets and create an electronic correspondence. All communication and contacting was done through email. I am also assisting with the creation of a resource room at the conference that will bring together vendors and organizations with information or equipment that could be valuable to our conference attendees. The conference will occur in August 2003 and so my project is ongoing through the end of my internship. Future projects will include assisting with the creation of a brochure and mailing lists and further work with publicizing.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past few years the Morris Arboretum, in conjunction with other institutions, has organized and planned conferences addressing the issue of invasive plants in the Mid-Atlantic and surrounding regions. Invasive plants are incredibly aggressive species that displace native plants and deteriorate ecosystems. The problem of invasive plants is one of the most detrimental to the surviving landscapes of the Mid-Atlantic. The Mid-Atlantic has been the entrance point for many invasive plants and currently these species are quickly spreading by their dispersal mechanisms.

The Morris Arboretum has been progressive in addressing this problem. Initiative has been taken to educate the public about the issue through courses at the Arboretum as well as organizing larger conferences that address the topic. The conferences that have been organized have run biannually since 1997 and have reached audiences estimated at over 600 people since the conferences began. The Arboretum has also created and adopted a policy for our grounds that aims to remove invasive plants on the property and to not recommend or sell invasive plants to homeowners. The policy was created in March of 2000.

THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

My project is to help plan, organize, and specifically publicize the conference, Invasive Plants Conference for 2003 (IPC). A committee consisting of organizations that are willing to donate time and energy plans the IPC. IPC will be held on August 6th and 7th at the University of Pennsylvania. This upcoming conference was already in the planning stages when I joined the committee in July 2003. My direct supervisor for this project is Jan McFarlan. Jan is the Education Coordinator at the Arboretum and works as a representative from the Arboretum to the IPC committee. Bob Gutowski, Director of Public Programs at Morris Arboretum, also works on the IPC committee and has helped to assign my tasks. The IPC committee consists of representatives from The Nature Conservancy, The Mid-Atlantic Exotic Plant Pest Council (MA-EPPC), Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore, The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, Penn State Extension, and the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources. The committee meets monthly.

CONFERENCE GOALS AND FORMAT

The IPC aims to educate on the following issues: land management and identification of invasive plants, herbicide use in managing strategies, alternatives to invasive plants in the home landscape, effects of invasive plants on wildlife, and the role of the federal government with invasive plants. There will also be examples of case studies as well as panel discussions on invasive databases and the St. Louis Guidelines. The IPC is directed to land managers, municipal workers, county and state parks personnel, home gardeners, restoration volunteers, conservation district personnel, and members of the green industry such as landscape professionals and nurserymen. Because of their nature invasive plants are showing up in almost any green area, making the issue a problem for everyone involved in the outdoors.

THE ST. LOUIS GUIDELINES

My project began with a vested interest in the St. Louis Guidelines. The St. Louis Guidelines were created through a conference at the Missouri Botanical Garden that enlisted members from the American Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA), the green industry, and garden clubs to create a voluntary policy stating that the landscape use and promotion of known invasive plants would be reduced if not eliminated. The policy is very similar to one that the Morris Arboretum created. The policy uses common sense to reduce the use of invasive plants in home and public landscapes, so that we reduce the frequency of them escaping to the natural landscape. The policy comes with a debate from members of the green industry. Unfortunately, some of the most popular plants used in landscaping are now showing invasive tendencies, examples of these are burning bush (*Euonymus alata*) and Norway maple (*Acer Platanoides*). An important part of my project was to target the green industry with publicity so that we could increase their numbers at this upcoming conference and to increase their awareness with the issue. We want the green industry to become more aware of the problem so that they act more responsibly in their businesses.

The IPC specifically deals with the St. Louis Guidelines through a panel discussion. The panel is still being formed but one of my first assignments was to help find speakers for the panel. The IPC committee thought the panel should consist of an amateur gardener, a landscape contractor, and a public land manager; these people would be able to discuss the Guidelines and their repercussions from different points of interest involved in the debate. I worked to find suitable people for the gardener's and landscape contractor's perspective. I was successful in the former with finding a member of the Garden Club of America who was at the St. Louis Conference and as well worked with public education on the issue. She was confirmed through Jan and will be attending the conference in August. I was not able to solidify anyone to the landscape contractor's spot. Although I contacted a few none seemed to work out.

PUBLICIZING THE CONFERENCE

Publicizing was the first priority in my project with the IPC committee. I began searching the Internet, library, Burrelle's Media Source, and other resources from the Morris Arboretum's Marketing Department to look for magazines, newsletters, and other publications to target for advertising. After finding a source that I wanted to target I found a contact at that company or organization to work with. This part of the job was either easy or exceedingly difficult. From a magazine's web page it was often simple to find advertising or editing staff with an email address, I could contact them with a request and wait for a reply. Finding other sources proved to be more difficult when there was only a general email address listed for the entire organization. This meant that my request was grouped together in such a large in-box that often I think it got lost in the shuffle. As well, I wouldn't recommend sending requests to the Webmaster of a web page. Although they create the web page they have no say as to what gets put on the web page. Quite often web pages for organizations or publications not only give information about a hard advertisement (in print) but they also donate space on the server for an "upcoming events" calendar. These calendars proved the perfect place for posting information when we were not given ad space.

I did all the publicizing electronically through e-mail. Through the Morris Arboretum Marketing Department press releases and event announcements are sent through the postal service. Although using the postal service does work, and is still used primarily in most marketing departments, electronic mail was easy to control and overall more cost effective. I can't prove this but I feel that electronic releases landing in someone's in-box have less of a chance of becoming lost in the shuffle than hard (or printed) copies. I think in the future we will see a change from the "snail mail" of current marketing strategies to the quicker, and less messy, electronic posting of events and press releases.

I first contacted an organization to find a suitable contact person to help me. In finding the contact person I also placed my request for their publication/web page to accept information about the conference and to allow us to use them as a publicizing source. If they said they were interested then I added them to a final mailing list. Throughout the fall I was searching for sources and contacts. I would make monthly reports back to the IPC committee who would offer help and ideas as to where I might find more possible targets. I estimated I contacted over one hundred organizations and confirmed 49 (as of March 2003) to receive information. Examples of publications that accepted our press release were The Forest Source, Landscape Management, and Pennsylvania State Parks. There was a strong support from regional organizations that would post our information in their newsletter, some of these included: New Jersey Landscape and Nurserymen Association and the American Horticultural Society. The complete list of publicizing sources is in the back of this report.

Another way of sending out information regarding the conference was through listserves. These were very easy to gain access to and are always free. We got our information through to five listserves that were all related to biodiversity and conservation interested subscribers. There is even a listserve that is focused directly on the issue of invasive plants.

I kept track of everyone who I contacted and then created an accurate final mailing list. These documents were formed in Excel and required constant additions and deletions. Every call or email added information to the list, without Excel I would have been completely disorganized.

While searching for sources to target I was also working on writing and creating a press release (see Appendix 1). A press release is a description of who, what, when, where, and why for any upcoming event. The press release should try to "sell" the event as well as keep the integrity of the event at hand. The Arboretum's Marketing Department, specifically volunteer Laura Silvasi, was very helpful in guiding me as to how to go about writing a press release. Because every publication and web page varied on how much information they wanted or how much room they could give us I created at the bottom of the press release a shortened calendar listing that could be used as well.

Along with the press release and calendar listing a picture was also sent. Sometimes to add interest a photo will be added to a release. An appropriate photo was found from The Nature Conservancy (TNC), which also officially released the photo for our use. Photo release forms were signed by both by TNC and the people depicted in the picture for legal reasons. The Nature Conservancy also provided an updated version of a general photo release form to our Marketing Department. This updated form is now being used in the Marketing Department for other publicized photos as well. The photo was sent to all targets as well.

The press release, calendar listing, and photo all officially were sent out in January. This job is ongoing and as I continue to find appropriate targets for information I continue to send them the press release and calendar listing.

My project also has involved me with organizing the location of the conference. The conference will be held at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Conference Services at the University of Pennsylvania manages the facilities. I have traveled with Jan and Bob to see the facilities, specifically Houston Hall on the campus of University of Pennsylvania. We had to look at the space to verify that it would suit the different needs of the conference. We have a goal of recruiting 350 people to the conference. Throughout the day there will be plenary talks that require all the audience in one room. We will also be having concurrent sessions during the day as well as a resource room and a preparing room for the speakers. The facilities were adequate we signed the contract to hold the event on campus.

RESOURCE ROOM

Currently I am working on a new component to my project. We are creating a resource room at the conference. The resource room will have vending tables from companies and organizations that will help the audience learn about different products or tools that would be useful in dealing with invasive plants. From working with Conference Services at Penn we are estimating 20-30 tables can fit around the walls of the room. These tables, although they will provide information and resources to the audience of the conference, is also a source of revenue for the conference budget. While meeting with the IPC committee it was determined that profit-making companies will be charged \$300 for a table, which includes one registration to the conference. Non-profit companies will not be charged for the table but those who staff the table are expected to register for the conference. The vendors are allowed to have information and examples of products but we ask that none actually sell products at the conference.

Before I was able to “sell” tables at the conference I first offered tables to the members of the IPC committee as well as organizations that assisted with a cash contribution to the conference. Altogether sponsors and organizers needed 10 tables. The remaining tables are to represent a variety of resources for the participants of the conference to learn about. Some topics include: native plant nurseries and seed producing companies, herbicide and equipment, companies that specifically deal with invasive removal, and governmental agencies that deal with this issue. Currently I have spoken with the sponsors and organizers and have a few companies interested. I will be sending confirmation letters to these organizations and companies soon. This job is not yet finished but my hopes are that it will be done by the end of March.

Another ongoing project that I am working with is keeping names of people interested to receive a brochure. We have not yet printed the brochure, which will include registration information, and plans are to begin the brochure soon. The flyers and press release that have been sent out have either Jan McFarlan or myself as the contact person for more information. As people call in I add their names to an Excel file that will be converted to mailing labels for the brochure.

As stated before this project is ongoing. I will be working with the committee and the conference until I finish my internship. Future projects will include creating, proofreading, and mailing the brochures and further work with press releases (releasing it to local newspapers).

Unfortunately the date and time of this conference will be after my internship has been completed at the Morris Arboretum so I don't know if I will be able to attend the final event. Regardless though my project has taught me many important managing and organizing strategies and although my project is not the most exciting of topics I have really enjoyed working with the

committee on the conference. In planning something this large, inevitably there are constant revisions, these changes has made me appreciate the process of organization. These skills that I have learned from the beginning of this year are invaluable for “real world” applications. To be able to say I have worked with marketing and been an organizer for a major conference is something that I feel will be useful for my future career.

APPENDIX

For Immediate Release

Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania
100 Northwestern Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19118

Direct press related
questions to Jan McFarlan
(215) 247 5777 ext 156

Press Release

Invasive Plants Conference 2003

PHILADELPHIA-- Researchers now estimate that there have been over 50,000 plant species introduced into North America. Scientists are now finding proof that certain invasive plants lead to a loss of biodiversity in native ecosystems. Many of these invasive species, which have been planted in our front yards and parks, have become “botanical pollutants” to our native areas. The effects of these introductions have resulted in rapidly shrinking populations of native plants, which are threatening native animals and insects, which depend on the plants for their survival. What does this mean for our area and what is being done to control this phenomenon? The Invasive Plants Conference will address the issues of invasive plants and to share knowledge from all levels of management so that techniques for control can be found.

The Invasive Plant Conference will be held in Philadelphia on August 6 – 7 to focus on the implications of invasive plants and possible solutions to this ecological problem. The Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania, The Mid-Atlantic Exotic Plant Pest Council, The Nature Conservancy and Penn State Cooperative Extension, The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and other institutions are organizing the conference.

The sponsoring organizations actively engage in public education regarding the management of invasive plants, and through the two-day seminar, will bring together experts from the fields of research, the green industry, invasive policy, public education, and on-the-ground management.

The invasive issue is not purely a topic for natural land managers. Members of the green industry are in the middle of a growing debate regarding the ethics of planting invasive species in the region’s public and private landscapes.

The conference, valuable for land managers, municipal workers, county and state parks personnel, home gardeners, restoration volunteers, and conservation district personnel, will also be highly beneficial for landscape professionals and nurserymen. The conference intends to raise questions from all sides of the debate, and will present alternatives to invasive plants and the latest research regarding possible solutions.

Specific topics to be presented include: The St. Louis Declaration, alternatives to planting invasive plants, the role of the federal government in addressing the problem, biological control, herbicides as control measures, deer impacts, ethics, and case studies.

The cost of this conference will be \$150 per person and includes lunches for both days. To register for the conference or for more information, please call 215-247-5777 x159 or email mabxeduc@pobox.upenn.edu. Find the information on the web at www.upenn.edu/paflora

CALENDAR LISTING

Upcoming Event:

Invasive Plants Conference

August 6 & 7, 2003

In Philadelphia

Invasive plants are serious threats to biological diversity and the health of our natural resources. This conference brings together experts from the front lines of research, the green industry, policy, funding, education, and on-the-ground management who are working together to solve this problem.

Speakers and Topics include:

Emile DiVito "Impacts of Invasives"; Cole Burell "More than a Pretty Face: Native Alternatives to Invasive Species"; Rick Darke "Roadside Restoration with Native Plants"; panel discussions on herbicide use as a control measure and the St. Louis Declaration; and new research regarding stiltgrass and mile-a-minute.

Presented by:

The Mid-Atlantic Exotic Pest Plant Council,
Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania,
The Nature Conservancy, Penn State Extension, and in partnership with regional businesses and organizations.

For a complete brochure contact:

Morris Arboretum
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