



FACILITY OPERATIONS REPORT

January to December 2014

Prepared by:
Patti Staley
Director of Horticulture
Park District of Oak Park

April 2015

Oak Park Conservatory Mission: The Park District of Oak Park's historic Conservatory inspires through the beauty of nature, imparts horticultural knowledge and provides a model for the stewardship of plants which are fundamental to life on earth.

| CONTENTS | PAGE |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Visitation | |
| Visitor Statistics | 3 |
| Financial Report | |
| Expense Categories | 5 |
| Revenue Sources | 7 |
| Collaborations | |
| Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory | 8 |
| Staff Development | 10 |
| Facility Improvements | 11 |
| Innovations | 12 |
| Looking Forward: 2015 | 12 |

INTRODUCTION

The Oak Park Conservatory transitioned into a year of change under new leadership in 2014. Insightful analysis and significant management and operational change were given by the team in all aspects of its operations. Much needed change was made to improve operations and make for a seamless transition under the new Conservatory Manager, Scott Stewart.

This year was a year of planning for not only the Conservatory but for integrating the Conservatory operations outside the facility to improve customer experience in our parks. This included landscape maintenance at Cheney Mansion, oversight and contractor management at native planting sites such as Lindberg, Taylor, Austin Gardens, and Field Parks, and an increased role in management of the Park District's general landscape maintenance contractor.

Planning also secured grant monies to cover cost of the Elsie Jacobsen Discovery Garden, Bioswale Garden and Austin Gardens Environmental Education Center.

Although the end of 2014 saw the departure of Scott Stewart, the Conservatory was able to begin implementing staff structural changes for greater results in efficiency, effectiveness and visitor experience. A union slot was reassigned from the Conservatory to Building and Grounds for the D97 sports field position and in its place a non- union Horticultural Supervisor position was created and filled by Patti Staley, in preparation for leading the horticulture team.

As a result, 2014 set the groundwork for increasing the role of management of our park's landscape maintenance, empowered individual staff members to innovate areas of productivity, revenue generation, and cost containment.

VISITATION

Visitor Statistics

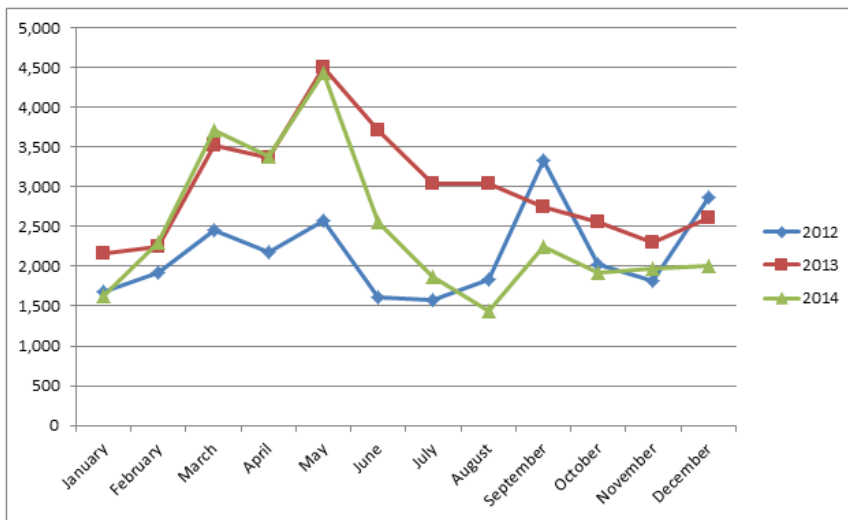
The Oak Park Conservatory welcomed 29,498 visitors in 2014. Visitation in 2014 represented the second largest number of visitors to the Conservatory since 2000.

A closer examination of the 3-year monthly visitor count trend reveals that the months of February, March and April showed a slight increase in visitors compared to 2013. There was a decline in visitor tracking in the months of June, July and August due in part to a changeover in systems for tracking. Therefore, some visitors may not have been captured during this timeframe.

During the year of 2014, the Conservatory hours have been added to drive increased visitation. In the past, the Conservatory was open only 2-4 hours each holiday. Starting in 2014, the Conservatory has been open a full 6 hours per day for each holiday. These additional hours have been added at no additional Wages or Benefits costs through the use of Friends volunteers to serve as Greeters.

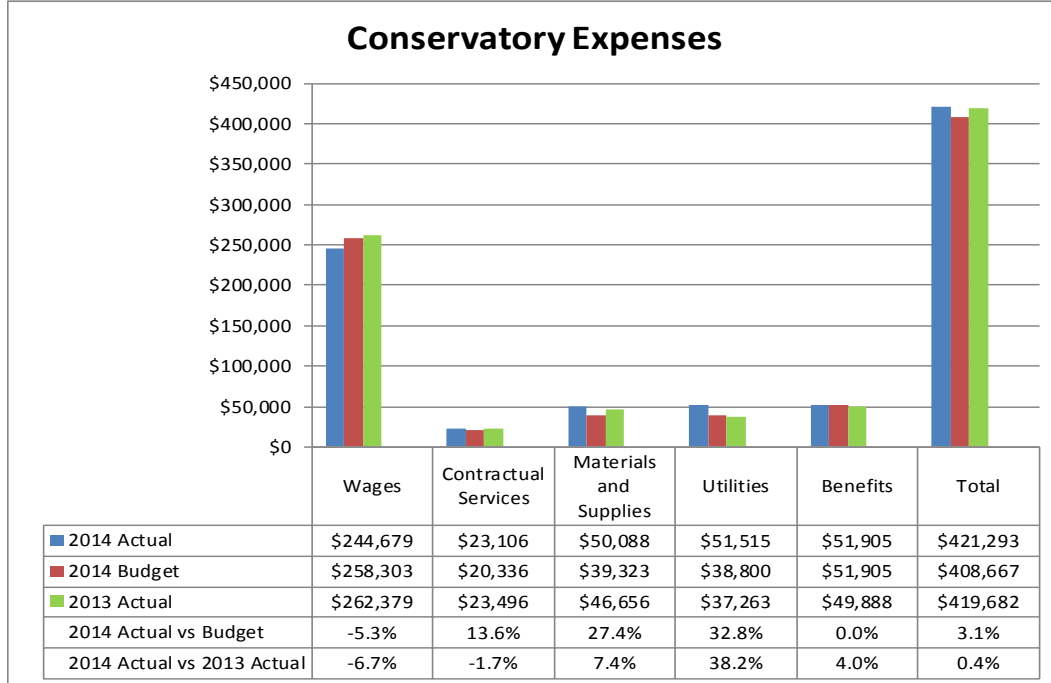
Increased visitor counts can be correlated also to larger events and programs offered at the Conservatory such as Fall Fest, Fright at Night, Kids Fest, and annual Plant Sale as well as increased offerings of Toddler Exploration time and Exploration Station. Conservatory staff has planned numerous new displays throughout the year. The Conservatory was featured in several media and news articles due in part to display offerings marketed.

| Year | Yearly Totals | January | February | March | April | May | June | July | August | September | October | November | December |
|------|---------------|---------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| 2012 | 25,891 | 1,684 | 1,922 | 2,462 | 2,177 | 2,568 | 1,607 | 1,583 | 1,832 | 3,341 | 2,031 | 1,817 | 2,867 |
| 2013 | 35,835 | 2,158 | 2,252 | 3,518 | 3,372 | 4,512 | 3,719 | 3,036 | 3,048 | 2,756 | 2,558 | 2,302 | 2,604 |
| 2014 | 29,498 | 1,621 | 2,302 | 3,717 | 3,386 | 4,436 | 2,559 | 1,877 | 1,445 | 2,250 | 1,915 | 1,981 | 2,009 |



FINANCIAL REPORT

Expense



Total Conservatory expenses were essentially even with 2013 (up 0.4%). This put the facility slightly over budget (3%) in expenses for the year. That overage can be traced directly to the cost of natural gas. Due to a combination of a rate increase in 2014, and a very long, cold winter, the natural gas expense line was more than \$12,000 over expected costs. Excluding gas, utility costs were within \$7 of budget despite rising rates from both ComEd and the water department. Staff made efforts to strive for efficiency and conserve where possible, keeping these items in line with their budgeted amounts.

The largest expense line for the Conservatory is wages. Full-time wages were within 1% of budget and Conservatory management was able to schedule part-time staff efficiently enough to end the year 5.3% under budget in total wages, and 6.7% less than 2013 total wages.

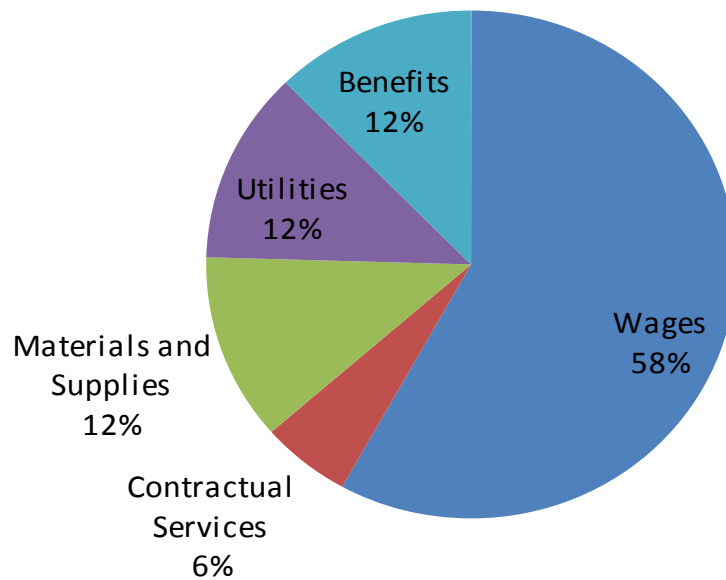
Contractual services for the Conservatory in 2014, included security services, pest control, custodial services, credit card processing fees, payments for outside instructors to lead classes, and property repair. Contractual services, though less than 2013 expenses, were over budget in 2014, due to \$6,300 in unexpected HVAC repairs needed at the end of the year. Were it not for those necessary expenses at the end of the year, contractual services would have been under budget for the year. The reduction in contractual expense is due to full-time staff instead of contractors leading classes.

Materials expense exceeded budget by 27.4%, but was only higher than 2013 numbers by 7.4%. The main driver for this was horticulture supplies for the park, which exceeded planned expenses by \$9,800. That line was tracking with the budget through November, but at the end of the year, it was decided to purchase 2015 growing supplies early to take advantage of available sales. These savings can be seen during the first quarter of 2015, where only 21% of the allocated YTD budget has been expended.

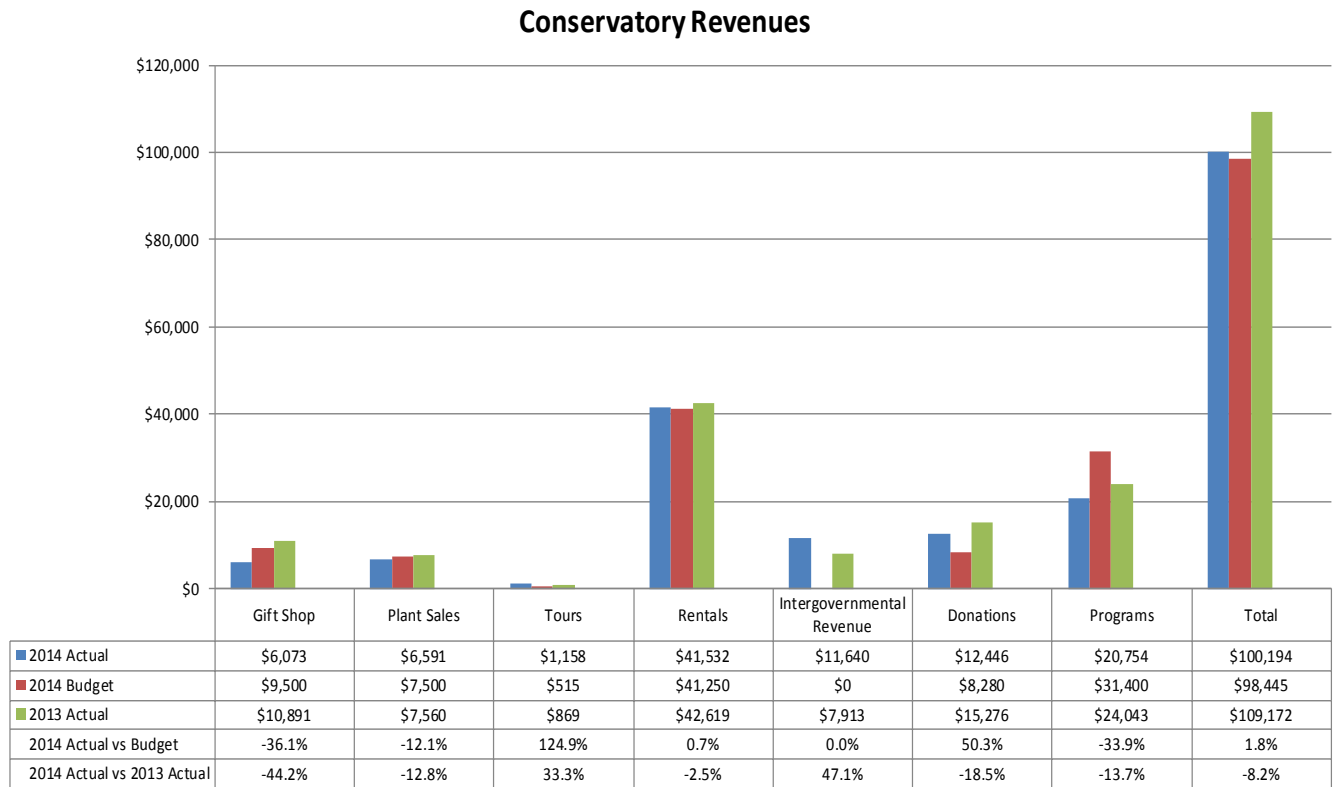
The only employee benefits paid out of the Conservatory are employee health insurance expenses. These costs are market driven and the entire agency is subject to the same increases.

□

2014 Conservatory Expenses by Category



Revenue Sources



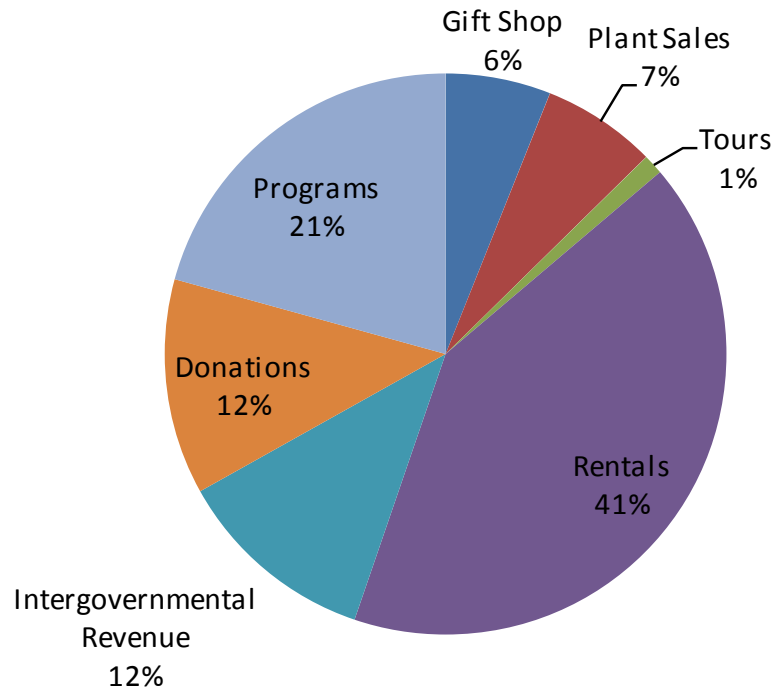
Overall revenues for the Conservatory in 2014, were slightly above budget (1.8%), but behind 2013 revenues (-8.2%).

The biggest portions of Conservatory revenues are Programs and Rentals. Programs include special events (such as Fright and Night and Fall Fest), camps, and classes. Camps are the biggest line item in this category and they missed budgeted revenues by 33%, causing program revenue to fall behind 2014 budget and 2013 actual numbers. Rentals came in slightly above budget (0.7% over), but 2.5% lower than 2013 numbers.

Tours and donations both came in well ahead of budget in 2014. These were areas where Conservatory management focused efforts on innovation and change during the year.

Intergovernmental revenue for 2014, contained two significant revenue sources that were unbudgeted. They were the Open Lands Grant (\$5,000) and the DECO Grants (\$6,640).

2014 Conservatory Revenues by Category



COLLABORATIONS

Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory (Friends)

The primary collaboration for the Oak Park Conservatory is its partnership with the Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory (Friends). For the past 28 years, the Friends have been promoting the Conservatory and supporting Conservatory programs through their educational outreach, volunteer coordination, and direct financial support. The Conservatory would simply be unable to fulfill its mission, remain as one of Oak Park's top tourist destinations, and maintain itself as the Park District of Oak Park's most enjoyed facility without the Friends partnership.

Friends Programs

During 2014, the Friends conducted numerous educational programs in partnership with the Conservatory. Each of these programs brought children and their families to the Conservatory, bringing increased exposure and revenue (*e.g.*, Donations, Plant Sales, and Gift Shop sales) to the Conservatory.

Friends programs during 2014 included:

- Exploration Station (ES) – Offered September to May, each Saturday and Sunday including two holidays. A total of 73 ES sessions were offered in 2014. Total number of participants 1,627, which is a new record number of attendees.
- Toddler Exploration Time (TET) – Offered September to May, every third Friday. Because of capacity reached in each session, a second session was added July-November
- 24th Annual Plant Sale – Held the first weekend of May welcomed 1,300 participants and reached record sales for the Friends.
- Kids Fest – Held the first Sunday of March welcomed 550 visitors.
- Conservatory Uncorked – Held monthly, June to September. Approximately 551 participants attended Uncorked.
- 24 Exploration kits were created and distributed to all eight District 97 schools during the last quarter of the 2013-2014 school year.
- Popular Scavenger hunt cards prepared by the Friends are distributed daily to Conservatory visitors.
- Exploring Backpacks funded by the friends are offered daily at the Conservatory encouraging hands on interaction for children.
- 70 docent led tours for 2014 was a new record for the Friends, total participants 1,554.

Friends Cash Contributions

Friends provided direct cash contributions to the Conservatory during 2014. Cash contributions included:

- Head Grower Overtime – Friends reimbursed the Park District of Oak Park for overtime pay generated by the Conservatory's Head Grower in the months leading up to the 24th Annual Plant Sale.
- Visit Oak Park membership on behalf of the Park District in order to advertise in brochure.
- Funding for seasonal and special plant displays.
- Cost sharing for soil and horticulture supplies.

Future of Friends Partnership

The Director of Horticulture, Friends Executive Director, and Friends President recognize the evolving nature of the Friends-Conservatory partnership. To this end, a number of measures will be proposed for implementation to manage and direct the future of the partnership. These include:

- Continued cost sharing for supplies.
- Recognition of the direct maintenance and upkeep costs of the new Elsie Jacobsen Discovery Garden.
- Exploration of contributions to help support facility improvement costs directly relating to the health of the Conservatory collection.
- Continued monetary contributions to introduce new plants into the Conservatory collections.
- Contributions to support Fall Fest and future events.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff at the Oak Park Conservatory is focused on providing a memorable experience for visitors. Each staff member understands and practices the customer service standards of the Park District of Oak Park and does their best to make each visitor's time at the Conservatory a memorable experience.

The Conservatory is staffed by a series of full, part-time and seasonal employees. Three full-time employees: Director of Horticulture, Horticultural Supervisor, and Conservatory Technician; five part-time employees: two Receptionists, one Assistant Grower, one Bird & Fish Caretaker, and one rental attendant. During the summer months, the Conservatory employed two seasonal employees to assist the regular full and part-time staff with maintenance of park flower beds. The Horticultural Supervisor and Technician average 40 hours per work week, the Assistant Grower averages 25 hours per week, the Receptionists average 20 hours per week, and the Caretaker averages 10 hours per week. Seasonal employees average 25-30 hours per week during April to August. The Conservatory also relies on a large and dedicated volunteer corps who give considerable time and effort.

Each full and non-seasonal part-time employee during 2014, either received or maintained their CPR/AED and First Aid certifications. These staff members also regularly participated in training opportunities offered by the Park District, as well as participating as members of the Safety Committee (Technician) and the Greening Advisory Committee (Manager and Head Grower).

Following are staff development and achievement highlights from 2014:

- Conservatory Manager (Scott Stewart January -December 2014)
 - Oversaw all operations of the Conservatory
 - Collaborated with Friends on all regular and special events
 - Prepared and managed fiscal year 2014 Conservatory budget
 - Secured a 6k donation from the Friends prior to budget approval for 2015
 - Prepared fiscal year 2015 Conservatory budget
 - Modified rental cost structure
 - Organized Fall Fest events at the Conservatory
 - Oversaw plan development for Conservatory Landscape & Elsie Jacobsen Discovery Gardens, Austin Gardens Environmental Center and Conservatory Bioswale Garden. Helped to secure grants for Elsie Jacobson Discover Gardens, Bioswale project and Austin Gardens Environmental Center.
 - Oversaw outside landscape maintenance contractors
 - Maintained Conservatory Facebook and webpage
 - Served on the Greening Advisory Committee
- Horticulture Supervisor (Patti Staley)
 - Oversaw all horticulture operations at the Conservatory
 - Supervised 40-50 volunteers
 - Integrated and trained a new group of volunteers to care for Conservatory collections
 - Redesigned a landscape plan of the current Conservatory Collection and integrated necessary changes for plant health
 - Designed a sustainable plan for the Fern Room to help decrease production costs
 - Designed and oversaw installation and maintenance of all park planting beds
 - Oversaw landscape maintenance at Cheney Gardens
 - Designed, installed, and maintained seasonal displays in Fern/Display Room
 - Oversaw horticulture material purchasing
 - Planned and organized Fright at Night at the Conservatory

- Continued participation on the Greening Advisory Committee
- Attended PDRMA training on Managing Employee Performance and Essentials of Human Resources.
- Technician (Mark Omi)
 - Continued participation on Safety Committee
 - Continued certificate as arborist
 - Created a publication of the history of the Conservatory
 - Attended PDRMA training on Managing Employee Performance
- Assistant Grower (Krista Kupperschmidt)
 - Maintained three greenhouses used for production of plants for park planting beds
 - Maintained landscaping at Cheney Gardens
 - Maintained plant materials in Fern/Display and Tropical Rooms
 - Oversaw and increased the growing of plant sale materials
- Receptionist (Jane McDonald)
 - Organized rental files
 - Oversaw facility rental attendant needs
 - Maintained print marketing materials for Conservatory events
 - Maintained visitor log
 - Managed daily operation of Gift Shop
 - Oversaw booking Conservatory Gallery artists on display
 - Initiated Exploration backpacks at the Conservatory
- Bird & Animal Caretaker (Chris Denne)
 - Maintained clean and healthy living environment for birds and other animals in Conservatory
 - Advised on the purchase of appropriate bird, fish, and turtle feed, toys, and supplies
- Volunteers (Friends)
 - Contributed a total of 6,498.45 hours in 2014 (total volunteer hours for 2014 equate to 3.2 full-time equivalent positions for the Conservatory)
 - Transplanted thousands of seedlings and plants in preparation for the 24th Annual Plant Sale and in support of plant production for park planting beds

FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

The following facility improvements were completed at the Oak Park Conservatory in 2014:

- Pump distribution system refurbished
- Roof leaks in Rubinstein Room fixed
- 25 energy savings auto-cell light switches were installed and funded by an Illinois public fund grant, MELA.
- Desert Room exterior door installation for the Elsie Jacobson Discovery Garden.

INNOVATIONS

The following new events, programs, practices, and innovations occurred at the Oak Park Conservatory in 2014:

- A new volunteer group was formed and trained to assist staff with the care of the Conservatory collection, opening up new opportunities for volunteers and helping to refocus staff time
- Plant Production procedures redeveloped to reduce surplus resulting in energy efficiency
- Cost share purchasing with Friends to obtain better rates on materials
- Increase in nature based program offerings
- Restructuring of Conservatory department and refocusing on employee tasks to better serve the strategic initiatives of the Park District

LOOKING FORWARD – 2015

2015 will mark a significant year of change for the Conservatory and staff. Departmental changes in the structure of staff, refocus of staff duties as well as the addition of park maintenance to the Conservatory's duties will make for a year of learning and growing.

The addition of the Elsie Jacobsen Discovery Garden, creating the "Fourth Showroom" to the Conservatory and new front landscaping around the Conservatory will expand the Conservatory experience and offerings.

Implementation of changes are well underway and expected to have a positive impact on our scoreboard for our parks and Conservatory as well as improve the quality of visitor experience across the park agency.

The following are initiatives and procedural improvements that the Oak Park Conservatory staff will be investigating, evaluating, and implementing in 2015:

- New programming for the Elsie Jacobson Garden in cooperation with the Friends
- Target market our rental audience to improve revenue
- Continued and improved target marketing in our gift shop
- Perennial and native cultivar plants implemented into park annual flower beds spring of 2015
- Continuing of plant production cost controls started in December of 2014
- Production of a Landscape Maintenance Policy Manual
- Energy efficiency improvement planning to the facility to include fin tube replacement for better heat distribution as well as standardizing and updating ventilation control systems