

# Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens

## Questions & Answers (updated 8-22-10)



### PROJECT VISION

#### **What is the “vision” for the Conservatory?**

Situated along the banks of our beautiful Rock River in Sinnissippi Gardens, the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens will be a tropical paradise located in the heart of our city. When complete in late 2011, the entire facility will be approximately **22,000** square feet and at the highest point, will stand **52** feet. This facility will be the **third** largest conservatory in Illinois. The site will be recognized as LEED certified (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) – the recognized standard for measuring building sustainability. The Conservatory is named after the Nicholas family who in 2006, announced their donation of \$2,150,000 toward the Conservatory project in honor of their parents, William and Ruby Nicholas. The gift was donated by Bill, Dan, and Ab Nicholas, who envisioned the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens as a gathering place for our community and a catalyst for future riverfront development.

The vision for the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens is to provide a place where the public will be able to learn about the world of plants and how they play an important role in our lives. It will provide a year-round exhibition of beautiful tropical trees, plants, and flowers. The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens will be open to the public and will be available for special events and meetings. In addition, educational seminars and programs will be presented on a variety of topics focused on the environment, beautification, and recycling. The Conservatory will also be made available to local and regional schools for student field trips and is scheduled to open in late 2011.

### PROJECT SCOPE HIGHLIGHTS

The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens Project will include construction of the Conservatory and site improvements.

**Phase I Project Cost: \$9,700,000**  
**Future Development: \$3,210,000**  
**Total Project Cost: \$12,910,000**

**Size:** Entire Building - 22,000 square feet (approximate)  
The Conservatory - 10,800 square feet; 52 feet tall

**Project Timeline:** Date Open to the Public: Late 2011

#### **Summary of Phase I Amenities**

- Indoor & Outdoor Gardens Open to the Public (year-round)
- Exhibition Area/Conservatory
- Growing Greenhouse
- Meeting Room/Classroom Space with audio visual equipment
- Lobby Area with Displays
- Children’s Educational and Play Area
- Gift Store
- Restrooms – Indoor and Outdoor
- Sculptures
- Catering Kitchen
- Outdoor Terrace

**Future Development:** As fund become available, work will include additional outdoor gardens, walkways, sculptures, and additional exterior amenities.

### **What happened to the old Greenhouse?**

The former greenhouse was over 85 years old and in need of significant repairs. Replacing the greenhouse would have cost over \$2.5 million in taxpayer dollars. Since the District was not generating excitement among donors and granting agencies to simply replace the greenhouse structure, rather than spend \$2.5 million on a replacement structure, the conservatory concept evolved. Replacement of the inefficient greenhouse with a state-of-the art building with enhanced operational efficiencies generated excitement and significant donations for the conservatory project.

### **What are the benefits of LEED certification?**

LEED certification is the recognized standard for measuring building sustainability. Achieving LEED certification is the best way to demonstrate that the Conservatory Project is truly "green" and will save on future energy costs for the facility.

## LAGOON UPDATE

### **What about the Lagoon?**

The Lagoon is situated in a construction zone for the Conservatory. Access will become available when it is safe for our citizens. Conservatory construction is scheduled to be completed by late 2011. The Lagoon is a separate "future" project, and will include dredging, the installation of a new retaining wall, walkways, gardens, water falls, and significant landscaping restorations. These amenities will be completed as funding becomes available.

## PHASE I: CONSERVATORY and BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

### **Conservatory and Site Development**

Phase I includes construction of the Conservatory and site development such as benches, parking lot, and lighting. Landscaping amenities include trees, shrubs, flowers, aquatic plants, streams, a waterfall, stone walls, an infinity pool with Koi, educational exhibits, glass art totems, additional sculptures, and a children's educational and play area.

In addition, Phase I of the Conservatory Project also features a spacious lobby area which will feature seasonal displays and exhibits. Adjacent to the lobby will be a catering kitchen, classroom, and workroom space, and a sizeable meeting room with an outdoor courtyard. There will also be a growing greenhouse and maintenance area to support the exhibition conservatory. The entry circle to the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens and the path connections to the Lagoon will feature plantings, waterfalls, and a stream.

### **What kinds of activities and programs will be held at the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens?**

The Conservatory is designed to accommodate groups, offer meeting space, and host educational seminars and workshops featuring related topics including horticulture, gardening, and beautification. The Conservatory will also accommodate small weddings and receptions, and feature periodic special exhibits and displays for the public to enjoy. Following construction, the site will again be home to the annual holiday tree lighting.

### **How will the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens compliment other area gardens or museums?**

The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens will be a destination that complements area gardens located throughout our community, further enhancing Rockford's reputation as "A City of Gardens." With the City of Gardens having received the 2005 and 2007 America in Bloom Awards, our community is aware of the benefits and positive impact beautification can have on our city. The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens will join our

community's current array of spectacular garden destinations such as Anderson Japanese Gardens and Klehm Arboretum. Together as a group, these and other garden sites will provide a major destination attraction and garden-tour opportunity for not only area residents to enjoy, but will bring many visitors to our community.

**When can individuals and groups begin making reservations to rent the meeting room and facility?**

The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens will be open for events beginning February 2012. Reservations will be accepted for meetings, events, and weddings after March 1, 2011.

COSTS and FINANCING

**Will the construction of the Conservatory be funded by property tax dollars?**

All construction-related expenses for the Conservatory project are being funded by private donations, and state and private grants. As the facility opens, there will be equipment and other ancillary needs, which the District will use capital dollars to fund.

**Will my property taxes be increased because of this project?**

No. Property taxes will not be increased to fund the building, nor the operation of the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens.

**Will it cost more to operate this new facility than the former Greenhouse?**

Yes. The business plan developed for the facility anticipated an increase in operating expenses; however, the additional operating expenses will be offset by revenue generated from the new facility. In addition, it is anticipated that energy costs will be reduced as a result of pursuing a LEED certified energy-efficient building design including geothermal heating and cooling, solar power, a white flat roof, dimming system for lighting, and energy-efficient light fixtures.

**Will there be a fee for admission to the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens?**

Visitors and residents will both have the opportunity to enjoy this unique facility. General admission will be \$6 per person for residents and \$8 per person for non-residents. Children age 4 and under will be admitted free when accompanied by an adult. There will be specific times when the facility will be open to the public free of charge. Membership packages will be released in November of 2010. In addition, there will also be many special events and shows.

**Has the cost of the Conservatory increased? If so, by how much, why, and where are the funds coming from?**

After bids for the greenhouse-glass portion of the Conservatory were approved, the winning bidder was unable to complete the project as per the Park District's standards. The second closest bid was then selected. The additional cost and delays in construction resulted in a project increase of \$600,000. The good news is that the approved bidder is now providing a much higher-quality structure, and the increased cost has been paid for by a donor, interest income, and a state grant.

**The original project cost estimate in 2007 was \$8.1 million dollars. Why has that original estimate changed?**

When the "Sinnissippi Park Riverfront" project was first announced, it was estimated that phase I of the project would cost approximately \$8.1 million dollars. The initial estimate was based on a general building concept and vision. Once the project's scope of work was finalized and final bids were received, the Conservatory's costs were adjusted to meet the vision and design. The Conservatory fundraising campaign continues to generate interest and donations to support this riverfront project.

## VISITOR and ECONOMIC IMPACT

### **What *visitor* impact will the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens have on our community?**

With the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens complementing existing garden destinations such as Anderson Japanese Gardens and Klehm Arboretum, attendance is estimated to “blossom” to include 40,000 visitors from outside the Rockford area. This increase in tourism is anticipated to generate approximately \$8 million per year in economic impact to our community. Increased usage is also expected from groups utilizing the facility for meetings, rentals, classes, workshops, lectures, garden tours, field trips, and attendance at special Conservatory events. *Economic impact estimates provided by RACVB*

### **What economic *construction* impact will this project have on our community?**

It is estimated that during the construction phase, this project will employ up to 95 full-time skilled workers – a welcomed addition to our community’s workforce. Upon completion of the Conservatory Construction Project, the Park District will be adding two full-time and several seasonal employees. *Based on NIBCA ratio of one job (for one year) for every \$100,000 spent on construction.*

## DONOR OPPORTUNITIES

### **How can I contribute to the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens?**

Over 1,100 donors and other funding sources have contributed to the Nicholas Conservatory project, generating over \$9.7 million. Immediate opportunities await donors for future phases of the Conservatory. A total of \$3.2 million more is needed to complete the full design, with projects completed as the funds are raised. For more information contact Stacie Talbert at **815-987-1695** or [stacietalbert@rockfordparkdistrict.org](mailto:stacietalbert@rockfordparkdistrict.org). Information is also available at: [www.rockfordparkdistrict.org/foundation](http://www.rockfordparkdistrict.org/foundation).

## INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS INTEGRAL TO THE NICHOLAS CONSERVATORY & GARDENS PROJECT

### **Who is the primary consulting design team?**

John R. Cook Associates, Sam Darby, Gary Anderson & Associates, HDC-Engineers, Arc Design Resources Inc.

### **Who is the contractor for the project?** Ringland Johnson Inc.

### **Who are the members of the Nicholas Conservatory Steering Committee Fundraising Team?**

**Bruce Atwood**

Atwood Enterprises, Inc. | Beloit College

**Richard Behr**

Joseph Behr & Sons

**Rob Funderburg**

Alpine Bank

**Tref Harnois**

Retired - J.L. Clark

**Bruce Hagshenas**

Benefit Planning Services

**Jim Keeling**

Hinshaw & Culbertson

**Nancy Lundstrom**

Community Volunteer

**Kent A. Mallquist (Campaign Co-Chair)**

Alhark Corp.

**Nate Martin**

Rockford School District

**Webbs Norman (Campaign Co-Chair)**

Rockford Park District Foundation

**Dave Rydell**

Bergstrom Manufacturing