

Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens Questions & Answers



PROJECT BACKGROUND

How did this project get started?

The residents of the Rockford Park District have consistently indicated in community surveys (most recent in 2008) their desire for further development and preservation of the riverfront for today and succeeding generations. As a result of this feedback, in 2004 the Park District Board of Commissioners selected Sinnissippi Park as the site for a centerpiece project for the Park District's 100-year anniversary celebration. In 1909, Sinnissippi Park was the first land purchased by the newly-formed Rockford Park District.

In March 2006, the Nicholas family 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. William and Ruby Nicholas met, married, and raised their family in Rockford. Like many families growing up in Rockford in the 1940s and 1950s, the three Nicholas brothers spent much of their time outdoors enjoying Sinnissippi Park and the Rock River. They were all born in Rockford, grew up on Hancock Street, and graduated from West High School.

The Park Commissioners first approved the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens project as the "centerpiece" of our 100-year anniversary at the February 28, 2006 Board meeting. At that time, the Nicholas brothers Bill, Dan, and Ab presented a gift to the Rockford Park District Foundation in the amount of \$2.15 million to initiate fundraising for the project. Under the leadership of the RPD Foundation and a group of community volunteers, the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens Steering Committee has raised the remaining funds needed to complete Phase I, a total \$9.1 million from 964 individuals, businesses, and organizations.

PROJECT VISION

What is the "vision" for the Conservatory?

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, flowers, and will include changing floral displays. The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens will be open to the public and will be available for weddings, receptions, and meetings. In addition, educational seminars and programs will be held 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.

PROJECT SCOPE HIGHLIGHTS

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

Total Project Cost: \$11,200,000

Phase I Project Cost: \$9,100,000

Future Phases: \$2,100,000

Size: Entire Building - 21,000 square feet (approximate)
The Conservatory - 10,800 square feet; 52 feet tall

Project Timeline: Proposed Date for Groundbreaking: July 2009
Proposed Date Open to the Public: December 2010

PHASE I: CONSERVATORY and BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

Conservatory and Site Development

Phase I includes construction of the Conservatory and site development such as some landscaping, benches, parking lot, and parking lot lighting. This includes trees, shrubs, flowers, aquatic plants, streams, a waterfall, stone walls, an infinity pool (inside and outside), Koi, educational exhibits, glass art totems, additional sculptures, a children's educational and play area, and various seating areas and benches.

In addition, Phase I of the Conservatory Project also includes a spacious lobby area which will feature displays, exhibits, and a historical mural. 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.

The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens is pursuing a "LEED" silver certification for sustainable energy efficiency featuring geothermal systems for heating and cooling, solar water heating, energy retrieving exhaust, and a photo voltaic electric system. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ encourages and accelerates global adoption of sustainable green building and development practices through the creation and implementation of universally understood and accepted tools and performance criteria.

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.

Summary of Amenities

- Indoor & Outdoor Gardens Open to the Public (year round)
- Growing Greenhouse
- Meeting Room and Classroom Space (available for rent)
- Location for Small Weddings, Receptions, and Catered Events
- Children's Educational and Play Area
- Gift Shop
- Sculptures
- Catering Kitchen
- Outdoor Terrace

Land Acquisition

The scope of the project requires acquisition of two pieces of land – one from the Union Pacific Railroad, and the other from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

Future Phases

Future phases will include water gardens, additional landscaping, and additional exterior amenities. Future phases will be completed as funds become available.

What is the difference between a Greenhouse and a Conservatory?

A greenhouse is a building where plants are cultivated. A conservatory is used to display tropical plants and displays and can be used for social gatherings. The original 15-foot high Greenhouse's purpose was to grow flowers and plants that could be used throughout the Rockford Park District's parks and facilities. This purpose changed as the Park District grew and it became impractical for the Greenhouse plantings to support the entire District. Over the years, the Greenhouse was used to host a variety of seasonal flower shows, but the building was not originally designed for this purpose. Similar to the Mitchell Park Horticulture Conservatory in Milwaukee and Chicago's Garfield Park Conservatory, the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens will be used to showcase diverse tropical plants and flowers, and encourage visitors to explore the fundamental connection between plants and human life. In addition, the Conservatory is designed to accommodate groups, offer meeting space, host seminars and workshops, hold small weddings and receptions, and feature changing displays for the public to enjoy.

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 changing displays. Following construction, the site will again be home to the annual holiday tree lighting.

How will the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens complement 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 receiving 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 begin taking reservations for special events, small weddings, and meetings beginning in January 2010.

COSTS and FINANCING

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

No. All construction-related expenses for the Conservatory project are being funded by private donations and state and private grants.

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 current Greenhouse?

Yes. The business plan developed for the facility anticipated an increase in operating expenses; however, any additional operating expenses will be offset by projected fee revenue. In addition, it is anticipated that energy costs will be reduced as a result of pursuing a LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certified energy-efficient building design.

CURRENT GREENHOUSE IMPACT

What will happen to the current Greenhouse?

The current Greenhouse was constructed in 1924 and initially was used to grow plants for the Rockford Park District's many plant beds located throughout the community. Over the years, its purpose changed to include limited seasonal floral displays. The 85-year-old Greenhouse is in need of substantial updating and repairs. The Greenhouse building itself will be removed and all reusable materials will be recycled.

Is the Greenhouse a historical landmark?

While the Greenhouse has been a community favorite for many years, there is no historical significance to the building. The current Greenhouse will be memorialized with a rendering and display incorporated into the new Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens facility.

I purchased a bench at the Greenhouse in memory of a relative.

What will happen to the existing memorials?

The Park District is grateful for the many memorials that were so generously donated to the Greenhouse and gardens area. Current and past donors and their gifts will be acknowledged and recognized within the conservatory area.

What will happen to the birds, turtles, and fish currently housed in the Greenhouse?

The Park District values all members of their Greenhouse family, including all birds, turtles, and fish currently residing in the Greenhouse. Staff members are committed to finding good homes for these members of the Greenhouse's animal family.

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

Visitors and residents alike will have the opportunity to enjoy this unique facility. The resident fee will be \$5 per person and non residents \$7; children 5 and under will be admitted free. In addition, there will be specific times when the facility will be open to the public free of charge. Membership packages will be announced at the groundbreaking ceremony scheduled for July 2009.

CONSTRUCTION IMPACT

Conservatory Construction and Rock River East Trunk Sewer Project

The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens Construction Project is tentatively scheduled to begin in mid-July 2009, and is expected to be complete by December 2010. In addition to the Conservatory construction, the Rock River Water Reclamation District will also be completing their Rock River East Trunk Sewer project, which includes replacing an outdated sewer line roughly from the YMCA to Symbol. Although these are two separate construction projects, both organizations are working together to ensure that users of the Rock River Rec Path and Sinnissippi Gardens users will be inconvenienced as little as possible. In addition, planning efforts are being made to ensure that the project will be completed in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

Rec Path Use and Parking Limitations

Use of the Rock River Rec Path from the YMCA to Symbol, as well as parking, will be impacted during various phases of construction. See the below chart for details and timeline. (Weather may impact timeline dates.)

REC PATH AMENITIES & PARKING LOTS AFFECTED BY CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS From the YMCA to Symbol		
	May 1 - Nov. 1, 2009	Nov. 2, 2009 - June 30, 2010
Rock River Rec Path Users		
For Walkers and runners	Open	Open/400' Gravel Reroute North of Lagoon
For Bikers, Rollerbladers, Walkers with Strollers	Open	Open/May have Difficulty with Gravel Reroute
PARKING LOTS		
YMCA Parking Lot	Open	Open
Swann F. Anderson Building	Closed	Open
Symbol Area Parking Lot	Open	Closed
GARDEN AREA		
Greenhouse	Closed	Closed
Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens	Under Construction	Open Dec. 2010
Rose & Perennial Gardens	Open	Open
Lagoon Access	Closed	Closed (will reopen Dec. 2010)

VISITOR & 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 over 140,000 Conservatory visitors each year, including 40,000 visitors from outside the Rockford area. This increase in tourism is anticipated to generate approximately \$8 million dollars 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?

During construction, it is estimated that 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?

Immediate opportunities await donors for future phases of the Conservatory. A total of \$2.1 million more is needed to complete the full design, with projects completed as the funds are raised. One very exciting feature is the “green” roof that will add energy efficiency, be accessible for viewing and offer demonstrations of energy conservation equipment (\$100,000). Many more engraved brick pavers are available for gifts of \$75 or \$125, as well as planting areas and fountains for gift levels in between, from \$500 to \$5,000. For more information, call Elaine Harrington at 815-987-1670 or email elaineharrington@rockfordparkdistrict.org. Information is also available at www.rockfordparkdistrict.org/foundation.

INTEGRAL INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO THE NICHOLAS CONSERVATORY & GARDENS

Who is the primary consulting design team?

John R. Cook Associates, Sam Darby, Gary Anderson & Associates, HDC-Engineers, Arc Design Resources Inc., Conservatory Horticultural Consultant – Adam Schwerner

Who is the contractor for the project?

The lowest responsible bidder will be selected in late June 2009.

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

Bruce Atwood

Atwood Enterprises, Inc.
Beloit College

Richard Behr

Joseph Behr & Sons

Ed Enichen

Guyer & Enichen

Rob Funderburg

Alpine Bank

Tref Harnois

Retired - J.L. Clark

Bruce Hagshenas

Benefit Planning Services

Fritz Jacobi

Retired - Rockford Register Star

Jim Keeling

Hinshaw & Culbertson

Nancy Lundstom

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 Mfg.

Jennifer Wood

Farrell & Associates, CPAs