

The Florida Botanical Gardens



Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



October 2022 - September 2023

BOARD AND LEADERSHIP

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Joye Swisher

Ruth Ullery

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Emily Goot
Executive Director

Jessie Wingar
Children's Garden Educator

Allison Fisher
Communications Coordinator

Carol Cortright
Guest Experience Manager

BOARD ADVISORS & LIAISONS:

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*Parks & Conservation Resources
Director*

Spencer Curtis
North County Operations Manager

INTRODUCING NEW BOARD MEMBERS AND STAFF

Jessie Wingar, FBGF Children's Garden Educator



Jessie Wingar joined the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation (FBGF) in May 2023 as the Children's Garden Educator. She has a background in volunteer coordination, education, and marine

science. After receiving a Bachelor's of Science in Marine Science and Biology from the University of Miami, she attended Coastal Carolina University and earned a Masters of Coastal Marine and Wetland Sciences with a thesis focused on shark physiology. Jessie returned to Florida to become the STEM Coordinator at Girls Inc. of Sarasota County and was a Volunteer Coordinator at Empath Health before joining FBGF. She is enjoying her time meeting and teaching all of the kids and adults in the Majeed Discovery Garden. Check out the Event Calendar to see which fun activities she has coming up: www.flbgfoundation.org/events.

Stephanie Messler, FBGF Board Member



Stephanie was born and raised in Pinellas County and still resides here with her husband, raising their two children together. In addition to being on the FBGF Board of Directors, Messler is a

Board Certified Behavior Analyst and a part time figure skating coach. Her cup is most full when she can help take care of others, so she helps her family and friends when she can. She loves getting her hands dirty and can often be found working in her yard in her spare time. She looks forward to her time on the FBGF Board, especially working with the young children in the new Majeed Discovery Garden.

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MESSAGE FROM THE *President*

By John Thomas, Foundation President

The past year has been characterized by significant growth of the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation. We have added two new Board members and a Children's Garden Educator to our Staff as noted below. These individuals add considerable diversity and strength to the resources we have to serve the regional community and garden visitors from around the world. In her new position as Executive Director, Emily Goot has increased visibility for the Florida Botanical Gardens through various TV appearances to promote the Majeed Discovery Garden, our Holiday Lights event and what the gardens has to offer to the community. *Recent notoriety regarding Holiday Lights was achieved by being ranked as the 9th best seasonal lights display for botanical gardens and arboretums in the country by USA Today.*

The number of volunteers who assist in our daily work and events have been instrumental to many of our achievements. Our volunteer base represents a cross section of the Pinellas Community, from retirees to high school students to working professionals. The contributions of generous donors have allowed us to dedicate more time to enhance various projects, educational programs, community events and partnerships with other organizations.

A major portion of our Board's time has been spent monitoring the construction of the Majeed Discovery Garden and Welcome Center that now houses our Gift Shop and Foundation Office. While construction is essentially complete, the work to capitalize

on the opportunities these projects provide is just beginning. The operational phase for the children's garden, with regular educational programming, will be an exciting venue for young families, school groups and nonprofit partners.

Beyond the calendar of planning for our major events: Holiday Lights, Gift and Plant Sale, Pumpkin Fest and The Pinellas African American Celebration, there are several projects we plan to commence during 2024. These include permanent restroom facilities proximate to the Majeed Discovery Garden, renovation of the Tropical Courtyard outside our new Welcome Center, Florida Friendly Landscape Signage in the Majeed Discovery Garden and renovation to return the waterfall feature on the Tropical Walk. The support of our Foundation members, donors, grant organizations, and Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources will all be necessary to accomplish these projects. A big **THANK YOU** is due to all who have contributed to our success and achievements in 2023!



John Thomas
President

MESSAGE FROM THE

Executive Director

By: Emily Goot

In FY 19, we planted the seeds for what was then the Children's Discovery Garden. Our growing season began, focusing on cultivating community relationships and procuring sponsorships for the major features of the proposed garden. We broke ground in FY 22, working tirelessly to ensure this vision came to life, and we could fulfill its mission to connect children with nature.

Historically, this has been a fiscally conservative board, with funds raised through our annual winter fundraiser going towards day-to-day maintenance of the gardens, as well as select projects to enhance garden infrastructure, such as the Vinery and Wetlands Walkway expansions. We survived a global pandemic in FY 20, while simultaneously fundraising for our most ambitious expansion yet. In FY 23, we have grown to a staff of four, from only one back in FY 17. Our growth required an improved headquarters in the new Welcome Center, which includes the Gift Shop and Foundation offices, to manage daily operations, and serve the general public on a more consistent basis.

In FY 24, our current Strategic Plan will come to a close, and we will undertake a planning process to map out the next three years.

This will be a time for harvesting—putting to use the addition of the Majeed Discovery Garden, through field trips, birthday parties, and programming for all ages and abilities.

Potential projects include a renovation of the Wall Fountain along the Tropical Walk, further improvements to the Tropical Courtyard, now home to the Florida Botanical Gardens Gift

Shop and Welcome Center, and interpretive signage through out the gardens, including highlighting the features of the Majeed Discovery Garden.

The Majeed Discovery Garden is a major accomplishment for this organization, and I hope our Board, staff, members, and of course, donors to this wonderful project are proud of the work completed by our partners in Hennessy Construction, and Coyle & Caron Landscape Architects.



Emily Goot
Executive Director



Capturing 2023



1. MARGARET GATES AND ALISON-NOURSE MILLER, members of the FBGF Interpretive Plan Committee, posing with Chuck Carden, General Manager of Tampa Bay Water. 2. GUESTS PERUSE PLANT VENDOR Art Stone Orchids at the Spring Orchid Sale in honor of Earth Day 2023. 3. THE POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE'S drumline performing at the Pinellas African American Heritage Celebration 2023, an event celebrating Black history and culture at Pinewood Cultural Park. 4. ST PETE YOUNG PROFESSIONALS participating in a planting day in the Majeed Discovery Garden in April 2023.



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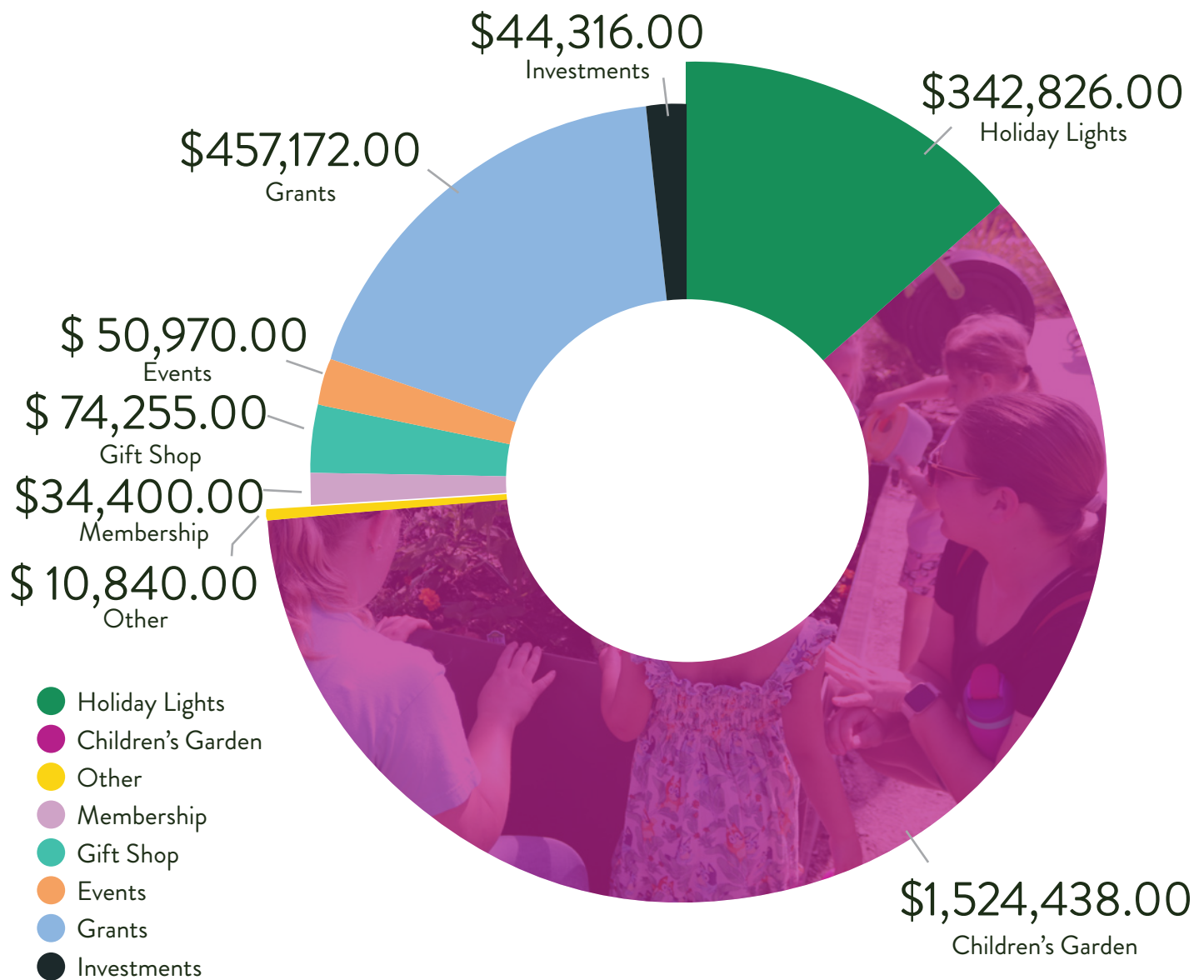
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5. VISITORS POSING FOR A FAMILY PHOTO during Pumpkin Fest 2022 at the Florida Botanical Gardens. 6. FBGF BOARD MEMBER VERNON BRYANT AND THE HENNESSY CONSTRUCTION TEAM installing bronze leaves in the Majeed Discovery Garden's donor path. These special donors contributed at least \$1,000 during the construction of this new children's garden. 7. FBGF BOARD MEMBER JANET KOTASH giving visitors a guided tour at the Florida Native Plant Symposium in March 2023. 8. AT THE HOLIDAY LIGHTS PREVIEW PARTY, the Board of Directors honors former Executive Director, Vernon Bryant, for his years of dedication and service.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY



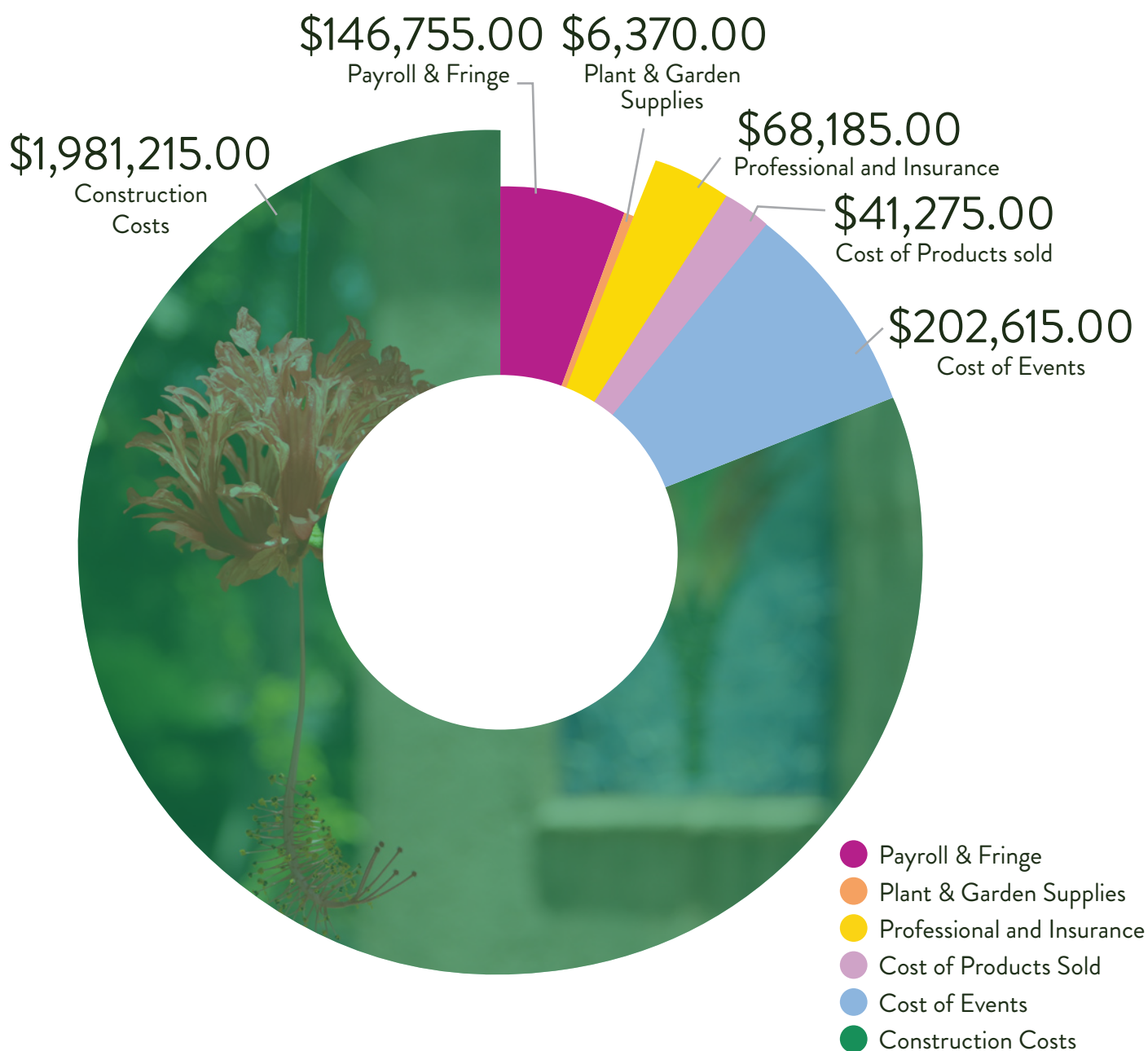
INCOME:

Donations	
Holiday Lights	\$342,826.00
Children's Garden	\$1,524,438.00
Other	\$10,840.00
Membership	\$34,400.00
Gift Shop	\$74,255.00
Events	\$50,970.00
Grants	\$457,172.00
Investment	\$44,316.00
Total Income	\$2,539,217.00

EXPENSES:

Payroll & Fringe	\$146,755.00
Plants & Garden Supplies	\$6,370.00
Operating Expenses	
Professional and Insurance	\$68,185.00
Cost of Products sold	\$41,275.00
Cost of Events	\$202,615.00
Construction Costs	\$1,981,215.00
Total operating expenses	\$2,446,415.00

Fiscal year change	
Increase/(decrease)	\$93,102.00
Net assets as of	
September 30, 2023	\$1,552,145.00





The Development of Programming in our *New* Majeed Discovery Garden



By Jessie Wingar, Children's Garden Educator

The Majeed Discovery Garden Grand Opening on November 4th, 2023 was a wonderful day filled with community spirit. Seedlings were planted, memories were made— and we began our birthday party rentals the very next day! We want to thank everyone who came out and celebrated with us for our long-awaited debut.

Since opening at the beginning of FY 24, we have kept busy with field trips, birthday parties, and a variety of other fun events. Birthday parties in the Majeed Discovery Garden combine rental of the Outdoor Classroom with themed, instructor-led activities. Our hourly rentals can also include office parties, bridal showers, wedding showers, or any kind of personalized experience. For more information on how to book your next event in the Majeed Discovery Garden, visit: www.flbgfoundation.org/rentals.

We kicked off our pilot Preschool Programming in January with five sessions a month. These include two Story Time sessions, and one each of Plant Play, Sensory Exploration, and Imagination Time sessions per month. Story Time includes reading, music, bubbles, and a fun activity. Plant Play involves learning about gardening and getting your hands in the soil. Sensory Exploration allows kids to dive into the world using their senses. Through play and games, children grow and use their imaginations during Imagination Time. Registration for each session can be found on our events calendar on our website: www.flbgfoundation.org/events.

Family programs began in February with the theme



of 'Valentine's Day Crafts from Nature'. The goal of family programs is to provide entertaining activities that connect you and your family to nature. These programs occur during the Third Saturdays at Pinewood event, from 10 am-12 pm in the Majeed Discovery Garden. The theme will change monthly and include such topics as team building through engineering, sustainability in the home, and building your own garden.

By providing this programming to the public, we have been able to interface with visitors of the Majeed Discovery Garden and receive feedback in real-time. One facet of the community we were asked to better serve was the local homeschool population. Beginning in April, we will host one homeschool program a month for children between ages 6 and 8, and one program for children between 9 and 11 years old. From June to August, the homeschool programming will be open to all children, so they may continue their learning and exploration of nature throughout their Summer vacation.

During the school year, our field trips can include both a tour of the Florida Botanical Gardens and a variation of customized educational activities in the

Majeed Discovery Garden. We are happy to provide an opportunity for outdoor learning suited to the needs of any grade level, age, or ability. Field trips are instructor-led, but we also have wonderful volunteers on staff to assist with the programs, which means we can accommodate larger groups. We always suggest leaving ample time for a picnic lunch in the gardens, and of course, a chance to explore the Majeed Discovery Garden and engage in all the play features!

Majeed Discovery Garden Program Dates through August 2024*

Preschool Programs:

Story Time (10-11 am): 5/1, 5/29, 6/3, 6/26, 7/3, 7/31, 8/5, 8/28

Plant Play (10-11:30am): 5/08, 6/5, 7/15, 8/7

Sensory Exploration (10-11 am): 4/17, 5/15, 6/12, 7/17, 8/14

Imagination Time (10-11 am): 4/24, 5/22, 6/18, 7/24, 8/21

Family Programs (10-12 pm):

4/20, 5/18, 6/15, 7/20, 8/17

Homeschool Programs (10-11 am):

Ages 6-8: 5/3, 6/7, 7/12, 8/2

Ages 9-11: 5/7, 6/11, 7/26, 8/6

*Dates are subject to change. Check out our Events Calendar for more information and to register at www.flbgfoundation.org/events.



VOLUNTEER *of the* YEAR

By Allie Fisher, FBGF
Communications Coordinator

The Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation (FBGF) is excited to announce Gayle Cooper as the Volunteer of the Year for Fiscal Year 2023. Cooper is actively involved in plant procurement and maintenance of the Butterfly Garden.

She has always loved plants. So after retirement, her daughter suggested that she volunteer at the Gardens. She began taking Master Gardener classes and has now logged over 2,000 hours. She's been volunteering with us for 15 years now, including four years on the FBGF Board of Directors.

Most of her time is now spent in the Butterfly Garden, which she is very passionate about. Since she's

been here, this area has expanded tremendously due to her dedicated team. She enjoys teaching visitors and her grandkids about the wonders of the Butterfly Garden.

"Nature teaches so much about life, and this Butterfly Garden is a place of hope," said Cooper, "There's always a miracle happening, like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, and we get to see it firsthand."

She is excited about the growth that she's seen at the Florida Botanical Gardens since she first started volunteering. Some of the significant changes include the

expansion of the Butterfly Garden and the creation of the Majeed Discovery Garden.

The FBGF was happy to select her for Volunteer of the Year because of her dedication and involvement.

"What an honor it is (to be named Volunteer of the Year). I do this because I love it, and to receive that honor is just icing on the cake," said Cooper.





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Are you interested in joining the awesome volunteer team at the Florida Botanical Gardens? Learn more at: www.pinellas.gov/volunteer-opportunities.

1. REPRESENTING FBGF: Former Board Members Gayle Cooper and Mary Sweeny alongside current Board Member Pat Dieterich at an event in the Gardens. **2. HELPING OUR GARDENS GROW:** Gayle Cooper joins Former Vice President Richard Berube, and current Board Member Emma Eshbaugh in planting.



Our new Gift Shop opened in time for the holidays!



By Carol Cortright, Guest Experience Manager

Last year ushered in exciting new changes for the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation's (FBGF) Gift Shop with a big fall move to the renovated Tropical Pavilion, a previously open-air structure in the heart of the gardens. Now known as the FBGF Welcome Center & Gift Shop, the space allows us to more effectively provide our visitors with information, directional assistance and membership services while generating retail proceeds that help the Foundation carry out its mission.

The Gift Shop continues to feature an ever-changing array of unique and thoughtfully-sourced products that surprise and delight our visitors from near and far. While we prioritize Florida-based and USA-made vendors, we also look for fair trade and eco-friendly goods that help us meet our goal of showcasing a unique and appealing inventory that won't be found anywhere else.

The larger space also allowed us to expand our children's corner with more fun and educational offerings that complement the learning areas throughout the Majeed Discovery Garden. What better way to encourage the excitement of discovering nature long after the visit, than by taking home books, toys and activity kits that keep their little minds engaged?

Did you know that FBGF Members receive a 10% discount on Gift Shop purchases by showing their valid membership card at the sales desk?

A delightful contingent of volunteers help keep the Gift Shop doors open during the week. We couldn't do it without them and are so grateful for each volunteer's special skill set and the fresh perspectives that they bring to the job.

The FBGF Welcome Center & Gift Shop is currently open Tuesday – Saturday from 10 AM-3 PM. If you are interested in becoming one of our valued volunteers, please email Carol Cortright, Guest Experience Manager, at flbggiftshop@gmail.com for more information. Weekly shifts are 10 AM-12:30 PM and 12:30-3 PM. If a regular weekly shift is currently unavailable, we always train back-ups to fill in occasional absences and to help during special events.

FBGF Welcome Center & Gift Shop Mission:



TO ENSURE OUR GUESTS GET THE MOST OUT OF THEIR EXPERIENCE

by providing information, directions, maps and other materials to more fully engage their senses while on campus.



TO ENHANCE OUR GUESTS' VISITS

by providing merchandise that encourages learning more about nature, plants, conservation, and our unique Florida ecosystem.



TO GENERATE FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE FLORIDA BOTANICAL GARDENS FOUNDATION'S MISSION

to create an environment for the community to come together for education, inspiration and enjoyment.



STRATEGIC PLAN 21-24

Strategic Plan Initiative Updates from Fiscal Year 23
October 2022-September 2023



100

Hours of the Owner, Architect, and Contractor meetings, to coordinate construction of the Majeed Discovery Garden



Interpretive Plan

6

New signs designed and installed along the Wetlands Walkway, funded through a grant by Tampa Bay Water



Marketing and Public Relations

25,058

Followers on the Florida Botanical Gardens Facebook page



Advocacy

12

Meetings of the Pinewood Partners (Heritage Village, Creative Pinellas, Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation, UF/IFAS Extension Services)



Welcome Center

1,300

Square feet of the new Welcome Center, including a Gift Shop, and Foundation office space



Events and Activities

47,375

Approximate attendees to our annual winter fundraiser Holiday Lights in the Gardens



Fiscal Resources and Finances

\$1,524,438

Funds raised, designated towards creation of the Majeed Discovery Garden



Infrastructure and Gardens

4

Members of the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation Staff, including Executive Director, Guest Experience Manager, Communications Coordinator, and Children's Garden Educator



HOLIDAY LIGHTS IN THE GARDENS

We want to thank you for another wonderful season of Holiday Lights in the Gardens!

To our volunteers: from workshop elves, entrance greeters, and Gift Shop volunteers, we could not host our annual winter fundraiser without your dedication and service.

To our visitors— it is our joy to bring this family-friendly tradition to the community, and we are so grateful for all of the generous donations we have received throughout the duration of the event. All proceeds from the event benefit the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation.

Special thanks go to Pinellas County, Parks and Conservation Resources, and the Ranger staff for their continued support and maintenance of these beautiful grounds. To Xmas Lights Install, for their tiresome work in coating the landscape with over one million LED lights.

Thank you to our sponsors!

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Christine Phares
Coyle and Caron
David & Pat Dieterich
Deb Bloome
Debbie Mallory
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Travis Hadwin
Vernon R Bryant
Vivian Haicken

Thank You

TO ALL OUR DONORS

Thank you to all of our donors, big and small! Every contribution, no matter the size, plays a vital role in driving our mission forward.

*Donations reflect our fiscal year,
from October 1, 2022-September 30, 2023*

\$100,000+

David Berolzheimer Foundation
Majeed Foundation

\$20,000-\$99,999

Anonymous
John and Kathy Thomas

\$15,000-\$19,999

John & Mary Sweeny

\$10,000-\$14,999

Fred & Irene Shabel

\$5,000-\$9,999

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Ravinder & Barbara Agarwal
Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach
The Family of Dennis J Schimka

\$100-\$499

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Honorary Club Members

Richard Berube
Vernon Bryant
Kamal & Najla Majeed
Bonnie Starr

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Florida Department of State -
Cultural Affairs
Pinellas Community Foundation -
ARPA
Publix
Rotary Club of Largo
Visit St Pete/Clearwater

In-Kind Donations

Icon Golf Carts
Tampa Bay Times
Florida Farm Bureau
FNGLA

Donation Boxes

We are very grateful for all the anonymous donations received from our donation boxes in the garden which totaled over \$6,800.00 for the fiscal year!



Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation
12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo, Florida 33774
727-753-7840

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