How a Public Garden is Redefining Outreach in the Urban Forest

Tower Hill Botanic Garden’s
Worcester Tree Initiative Outreach Program

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Tower Hill Botanic Garden Mission

**Inspire** the use and appreciation of horticulture to **improve** lives, **enrich** communities, and **strengthen** commitment to the natural world.
Worcester County Horticultural Society
Horticultural Hall
Worcester County Horticultural Society
Flower Shows and Vegetable Competitions
Tower Hill Farm
Gardens and collections

Formal Gardens
Gardens and collections
Cultivated Wild
Gardens and collections
Agrarian Gardens
Community Engagement and Impact
Educational Programs and Events

• Focused workshops connect participants with a particular aspect of horticulture or teach a new skill
• Drop-in activities allow visitors to engage with our mission at their own pace
• Interpretive materials enhance the visitor experience, offering new information, insight, and context to our displays
Community Engagement and Impact
Horticulture Therapy Programs

Garden Within Reach
- Universally designed garden
- Opened in late 2015
- Learning environment for people of all abilities
- Annual plantings by volunteers from local organizations serving differently abled adults
- Series of horticulture therapy programs
Garden for All

Worcester Refugee Gardening Program

Botanic Tattoo Weekend
Garden for All

Tower Hill celebrates Worcester Pride Week
- Visitation: **151,000 annually** (80% increase in 5 years)
- Member Households: **8,600**
- Youth and Adults Educated: **10,000 annually**
Success with challenges: Are we a “garden for all?”

**Barriers**
- Admission price
- No public transportation option
- Elitist perception of botanic gardens

**What is missing?**
- Physical connection to Worcester
- Ability to engage the Worcester community in their own space
- Feeling of abandonment from Worcester residents
WORCESTER, MA

Estimated population: 185,677

White: 69.40%
Black or African American: 13.23%
Asian: 7.31%
Other race: 5.31%
Two or more races: 4.20%
Native American: 0.52%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 0.04%

Median household income: $45,869
Mean household income: $65,446
Worcester Tree Initiative
Began with Pest Devastation
30,000 Trees
January 2009
90% of Worcester’s
Burncoat neighborhood’s Trees.

To Date:
36,120 Trees Cut
1656 Acres Cut
Community Trees & Education
Developed Community Outreach Programming - Connecting People & Trees
Youth Programs
Our Mission:
Rebuilding Worcester County's Community Forests

Worcester Tree Initiative exists to grow, care for, and protect Worcester County’s urban and town forests. Our community based approach includes education, training, tree planting, and long term monitoring and care to achieve significant improvements to the environment and to the quality of life in our cities and towns.
Merging Institutions:

- THBG was fiscal agent to Worcester Tree Initiative since 2009
- Decision by WTI Steering Committee to dissolve or find a permanent situation
- Boards compromised & WTI became independent LLC of THBG
- Period of “Dating” to see if it was a good fit (2015-2019)

*Messaging* from day 1, CEO treated WTI as a department of THBG and messaged it this way

Became a THBG department April 2019- CEO discretion, board accepted it
Organizational Structure:

Chief Executive Officer

- Chief Financial & Operating Officer
- Director of Institutional Advancement
- Director of Horticulture
- Director of Education
- Executive Director of Worcester Tree Initiative

WTI Executive Director Functions spread to appropriate departments.
The Benefits
INCREASED CAPACITY

Master Tree Stewards Program

Wider Audience Reach

Expanded Community Outreach
Expanding Reach

Bringing Tower Hill to the Community

Bringing Worcester Tree to Greater Worcester County
INCREASED PRESENCE
Blending Cultures

Adaptability

Stability
Worcester County Horticultural Society was formed in 1843 by farmers and prominent members of society with a passion for plants. In its 175 years it has passionately advocated its mission to Connect People and Plants through events within the community. For 340 years the Horticultural Society operated out of a small building in the heart of the city. The community where it germinated was the heart of the city, the heart of the community, the heart of the city's history.

One group in Worcester connecting people to plants is Tower Hill Initiative, a small non-profit organization that has been connected with Tower Hill since its conception in 2009. WTMI was formed when Asian Longhorned Beetle was discovered in Worcester and the surrounding towns. The Tree Initiative began as a reforestation group, supporting the community as trees were removed in the Asian Longhorned Beetle eradication effort. Residents in the affected communities continue to plant free trees to replace the ones they lost through WTMI’s Tree Giveaway program. There is a sense of unity in the community as tree planting is underway.

In the 8 years since Worcester Tree Initiative began this work, great efforts have been made to replace every tree that got removed in the Asil eradication effort. However, Asil is not the only factor in Worcester’s deforestation. The city’s canopy is aging and the city itself is becoming more dense. Accommodating cars, cyclists and pedestrians leaves little room for street trees. In much of the most densely developed parts of the city, even within the more rural portions where there is more space, the mature trees are dying and need to be replaced.

**Trees for the City Tower Hill Botanic Garden**

**People and Plants**

WTMI knows there is a strong need for a group to take up the cause of the city’s urban forest. Research has shown that the urban forest offers immense benefits to people and to the cities in which they grow. They help to keep people and the whole city cool. They clean the air of polluting gases and dust. They have been shown to be connected to better health in a multitude of ways from reduced risk of cardiovascular and heart related illnesses to stress reduction, improved mental health, and greater recovery times from illness and injury. Trees can even improve human health and reduce crime rates. In our high tech, fast paced world people need plants more than ever.

**Benefits of Partnership**

It should be clear to see that these two organizations share a common cause and why it has been easy to come together under the same banner. In 2016 Tower Hill Initiative became an independent program of the Worcester County Botanic Garden. This partnership offers great benefits to both groups. Tower Hill and WTMI gain a partner well positioned in the community that has developed in Worcester in the past 30 years. They are able to connect to people with little to no knowledge of their gardens and find ways to connect them to plants. They also gain access to the many other groups within the city with whom WTMI has connected, not just environmental groups but community development agencies, schools, and city officials. Tower Hill Initiative gets to expand the scope of educational opportunities and resources they can offer to their members through WTMI’s educational efforts.
Complimentary Missions
Expanding Audience Engagement
Bringing horticultural expertise into the community
The Challenges
Blending Cultures

Informal

Structured
Worcester Tree Initiative
Tower Hill

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