

Pennsylvania House Tourism & Recreation Development Committee

Tour and Hearing

Role & Impact of Public Horticulture in Tourism in the State of Pennsylvania

Kennett Square, PA

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The Arboretum at Penn State

I am the former Executive Director of the American Public Gardens Association, a 501 c 3 Association whose corporate headquarters are located in Kennett Square.

- Public Gardens and Arboreta are relevant community centers that provide tourism and other positive impacts on local, regional, and the national economy.
- Most member gardens and corporate members of the American Public Gardens Association are small businesses
- By definition, every public garden/arboreta receives outside visitors and thus is a tourism destination as their visitors spend money in the city and region where the garden is located
 - o Few gardens provide lodging, many lack onsite food service outside of events
- Gardens provide educational services for learners of all ages and are living libraries of plants used in medicine, agriculture, horticulture, forestry and many other areas.
- Collectively, The American Public Gardens Association estimates 120 Million Visitors per year to public gardens
 - o This is almost as much as professional sport attendance for all major sports *combined*.
 - o Our coalition estimates 4.5 million visitors per year to PA gardens alone.

I am the current Director of the Arboretum at Penn State, located in the center of the Commonwealth.

- Our Arboretum lives out the University Mission of *Teaching, Research, and Service* daily, striving to be a shining example of a 21st Century Land Grant School
 - o Founded 1855 as one of the first colleges of Agricultural Science in the US. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 honed its focus further. Sen. Justin Morrill himself was a horticulturist.
 - o ~150 years later, the Arboretum at Penn State began to be constructed. Its first phase was completed in 2009. It has quickly become one of the most popular features on campus.
 - o It provides drop-in and other educational classes for young learners, a place for instructors in every college to bring University students to learn 'in the field' and there are about a dozen research projects active onsite at any one time from many different Colleges. Perhaps most important, we provide a readily accessible connection to nature directly adjacent to almost 100,000 students and faculty/staff live and work daily.
- The Arboretum has grown primarily through private contributions.

Today's hearing is a perfect opportunity to spotlight how the Arboretum interacts with the tourism and recreation community

- The Arboretum at Penn State has applied for and received funds through a *Happy Valley Adventure Bureau* Tourism Grant made available from a Centre County Hotel Room Tax
 - o Applied 10 times during the period of 2010-2022, average amount received was \$14,673
 - o In 2022-2023, we received \$7500; a total of \$636,900 was awarded to 56 applicants
 - In previous years, these funds promoted the Arboretum as a destination in local and regional media for new garden additions such as our Childhood Gate Children's Garden (2014), and our newest Garden, the Pollinator and Bird Garden (2021).
 - However, a vast majority of received funds were spent annually to promote and execute our October Pumpkin Festival.
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- The Pumpkin Festival began in 2011 and it unites town, gown, and region
 - o It has grown to attract more than 10K people each year from Centre County and beyond
 - o The Arboretum grows and gives out over 1000 free pumpkins in early October and one week later...
 - o Judged pumpkin carving by community members, Penn State administrators, friends of the Arboretum and volunteers
 - All age ranges represented in categories as well as "best of" theme
 - o On Friday and Saturday, a Harvest-themed Festival includes strolling performers, local artisans and crafts, children's activities, and local food vendors
 - o What could be more American than Pumpkins, and more germane to our mission?
 - Native to North America, Pumpkins (= Squash) are part of the three sisters of agriculture
 - Our founding fathers notably strove to grow them not only to feed themselves but to feed livestock
 - Their active cultivation and breeding dates back at least 6000 years throughout many cultures
 - According to National Ag Statistics Survey data (2021)
 - PA ranks first in the number of Floriculture Operations, often overlooked as part of agriculture
 - PA Pumpkin utilized production value was in the top 5 of all US States
 - Our Pumpkin Festival unites the art, science, and business of public horticulture and soundly supports regional tourism and recreation to counties not typically known as popular destinations, but rich in history and tradition.

To summarize what the Arboretum means to our University and community:

We Are...

Both pretty and gritty,

A place where our kids come to play every day, (and)

Where we are poised for TREE-mendous growth in the years to come,

While still having our plants,

A solid defense that is always stepping up.