

Historical Overview of Hilltop, Bloomington Youth Garden-Nature  
Center

Garden, HILLTOP, the nation's only outdoor garden oriented science education Center on the university level was founded in 1948 jointly sponsored by the City Department of Parks & Recreation, Indiana University, and the Bloomington Garden Club. Two ideas undergird the garden-nature center: 1) That is is an intellectual activity pursued voluntarily by youth; and, 2) That it is today's social necessity.. the Center is a powerful social instrument for good when community supported and the citizens are fully involved in its life.

The community has been the beneficiary of this pioneering program for the city's youth, ages 8-12, for more than three decades. Over 5000 youths have learned to garden, gaining knowledge and respect for the land and their life-support systems.

Hilltop was initiated both as a teaching facility for University students to gain experiences in learning how to teach science to boys and girls as well as a leadership training center. The original concept has been continually enlarged and serves youth, adults, handicapped, senior citizens, not only in gardening but in environmental science education and all phases of horticulture. More than 1000 student instructors have been involved in the leadership training program.

Youth gardening is a direct way of creating environmental awareness. It involves youth at a highly receptive and enthusiastic stage of life. The community has everything to gain from an expansion of their support of this program.

Another major contribution has been the development of leadership among the young gardeners themselves. Outstanding gardeners are appointed to a Junior Board, assigned specific responsibilities, and contribute significantly to the efficient operation of the program. Its membership forms an important nucleus of potential community leadership through their heightened experience.

The establishment of a Civic Garden-Nature Center has been a long term vision of the Director of Hilltop and of many of those working with her over the years.



This is seen as a logical and much-needed extension of the leadership training program for University students now in effect. The awareness of the need of such centers in an urban-oriented society has reached such proportions that the University students need increased opportunities in the administration and operation of multi-purpose civic garden-nature centers as part of their educational training. Many will be faced with the likelihood of establishing such centers or of working in or with them.

The growth of Hilltop in numbers of participants and in concepts has been spectacular, the accomplishments notable. The current facilities and staff has been inadequate for the expanding program. A small garden house, with toilet facilities, replaced an earlier primitive shelter in 1960- today, although attractive, well-designed, from the beginning too small to accommodate the numbers of children and university students participating in the program. Changes have come to the land, too, trees grow and drainage changes. Class room space is at a priority, storage is inadequate, tools are rusting, areas are old and worn out, a new physical facility is needed.

The past 5 years has seen a much expanded program at Hilltop. With changing life styles and a nationwide interest in environmental education the program potential in "living art" at Hilltop is unbounded. Annually, programs are offered to youth, adults, university students, handicapped youth and older Americans through a series of workshops, open houses, plant sales, and part-time employment for high school and university students. Much of the additional programming was made possible through the dedication of community volunteers, members of the Hilltop Garden Council, Inc., a special project of the Youth Gardening Committee of the Bloomington Garden Club.

Indiana University is committed to continuing Hilltop through relationship with the College of Arts & Sciences, Department of Biology. Hilltop is the one place on campus that all students, alumni, and visitors can relate in a tangible way. Many visitors have toured the facilities. Horticulture is an integral part of other University art commitments.



Community financial support has come each year from the City Department of Parks and Recreation. It continues its support with that of the Bloomington Garden Club. The Hilltop Garden Council, Inc. continues to expand acting as a support group with volunteer manpower and some financial support for initiating and producing programs.

Indiana University has given the land, buildings and other physical facilities, and provides services to maintain the physical plant and grounds. The Director's salary comes from Indiana University and the students provide the teaching staff through in-service training for the spring portion of the program.

Indiana University has allocated 4.65 acres for the expansion of the present garden area including the present 1 acre ground.

As the Hilltop program has grown and flourished there has been a concurrent need for additional, highly-trained staff, and at least 1 assistant to the Director on a full-time basis. Continuity in staff is highly desirable to achieve some of the objectives of the program. Finding suitable leadership for the summer program has been increasingly difficult on a part-time basis with the salaries offered, and having to train individuals not familiar with the program nor oriented or dedicated in the way desired is not in the best interests of the program. Since Indiana University is on a different seasonal schedule with the second term ending in late April, the personnel problem is acute at a critical time in the spring garden-nature study program.

Additional financial support is need for year fellowships to be awarded for assistants who are already trained in horticulture, ecology or science education, and who would benefit from a summer as an internat Hilltop. At least 4 fellowships at \$1400 each for May 1 - August (mid month). The fellows would work directly with the youth gardening-nature study program in addition acquiring training in the organization and administration of a civic youth garden-nature center.



PROJECTION OF STAFF:

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR      BOARD OF TRUSTEES      ADVISORY BOARD      EXECUTIVE BOARD OF COUNCIL  
HORTICULTURIST ( AT THE BEGINNING MAINTENANCE SUPERIVISOR OF GROUNDS AND BUILDINGS)  
BUSINESS MANAGER OF GIFT SHOP  
SECRETARY

SUPPORT GROUPS

INDIANA UNIVERSITY: DEPT OF BIOLOGY.. SPEA...EDUCATION...RECREATION & PARK ADMINISTRATION.  
HOME ECONOMICS.. SOCIAL SERVICE

COMMUNITY: BLOOMINGTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.. CITY DEPT OF PARKS & RECREATION..  
BLOOMINGTON GARDEN CLUB.. MONROE COUNTY GARDEN CLUBS..METROPOLITAN SCHOOL  
SYSTEM.. STONEBELT CENTER.. CORPORATE GROUPS.. LOCAL AND STATE FRIENDS OF  
HILLTOP.. I. U. ALUMNI

HILLTOP