



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

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First Lady Michelle Obama Presents Top Museum Award to The New York Botanical Garden



First Lady Michelle Obama presented a 2010 National Medal for Museum and Library Service to The New York Botanical Garden—one of five museums and five libraries honored in a White House ceremony on Friday, December 17, 2010. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) awards the National Medal, the nation's highest honor for museums and libraries, to institutions for outstanding social, environmental, or economic contributions to their communities. This year the Institute of Museum and Library Services is recognizing one museum and one library for their work to advance global cultural understanding. The New York Botanical Garden has been chosen for this distinction due to its cutting-edge work in worldwide botanical research, conservation, and horticulture technology and display. The Garden will receive a \$10,000 prize along with the other winners to help raise public awareness of the good work the institutions are doing in their communities.

"You come from every corner of the country, from big cities and from small towns," the First Lady said during the award ceremony. "And your programming involves everything from puppetry and gardening to Civil War battles and science experiments. But you're here today because you all share the same commitment to excellence, the same determination to serve your communities, and the same spirit of innovation. You're here because you've challenged the conventional notions of what a library or museum can and should be, pushing the boundaries of what's possible, embracing new ideas and approaches... While some of your work may be national in scope, ultimately your most powerful impact is local. Each of you is an integral part of your community. Each of you strives every day to meet the needs of the people who walk through your doors. And that's particularly true in times of challenge and crisis, when many of you offer vital services, stepping up to be there for folks when they need you the most. For example, The New York Botanical Garden started the Bronx Green-up revitalization program, and they helped plant hundreds of school and community gardens in struggling neighborhoods so that families could grow their own fresh produce."

Gregory Long, President of The New York Botanical Garden, and Carrie Laney, the Garden's Vice President for Government and Community Relations, attended the White House ceremony accompanied by Karen Washington, a community activist who, in partnership with the Botanical Garden's Bronx Green-Up program, turned empty lots into beautiful gardens. Each medal winner was asked to select one community member who could illustrate the institutions' impact through a personal story. Karen Washington has spoken out for garden protection and preservation, striving to make the Bronx a better place to live.

As a member of La Familia Verde Garden Coalition, she launched City Farms Market, bringing garden fresh vegetables to her neighbors. Karen is on the board of Just Food, an all-volunteer effort promoting a holistic approach to food, hunger, and agriculture issues. She leads workshops on food growing and food justice for community gardeners all over the city. Karen is also president of the New York City Community Garden Coalition, a group that was founded to preserve community gardens. She joined The New York Botanical Garden Board of Trustees in September 2009. According to Karen, “To grow your own food gives you power and dignity. You know exactly what you're eating because you grew it. It's good, it's nourishing and you did this for yourself, your family and your community.”

“We are extremely honored to have The New York Botanical Garden’s achievements recognized by the Institute of Museum and Library Services through this prestigious award,” said Gregory Long. “The Botanical Garden is thrilled to receive the National Medal for Museum and Library Service. This award is a tribute to our dedicated staff members who continue to pursue the Garden’s mission in horticulture, science, education, and community service.”

“This year’s National Medal winners are serving their communities with innovative and creative new approaches to lifelong learning, commitment to addressing diverse community needs, plain old hard work, and a lot of heart,” said IMLS Acting Director Marsha L. Semmel. “Many of our winners have evolved and grown despite tremendous challenges – all to empower and enrich the lives of their community members by cultivating collaboration and openness. I am deeply appreciative of their efforts to make a difference. They serve as the nation’s role models.”

One of the Garden’s most renowned international initiatives, the Institute of Economic Botany (IEB) is dedicated to the study and understanding of the relationships between people and plants, including plant-based medicine, sustainable agriculture, and forestry. In a time of rapid global change, the IEB works to further the conservation of Earth’s plant species by studying how plants are used in traditional cultures, conducting research on medicinal properties, and advocating for their conservation.

Thousands of plants, herbs, fruits, vegetables, and trees thrive on 250 acres of preserved green space carefully cultivated and maintained by The New York Botanical Garden. An advocate for the plant kingdom, the Garden uses its expertise and facilities to present programs, events, exhibitions, and classes that emphasize the importance of environmental conservation, healthy living, and science education, as well as strengthen the community.

Twenty-two years ago, the Bronx was overrun with abandoned lots and buildings, and neighborhoods were losing their sense of community. To help transform the community, the Garden piloted *Bronx Green-Up*, a horticulture outreach program that works with community groups to beautify, stabilize, and revitalize urban neighborhoods by planting public gardens in abandoned spaces. These gardens are maintained by local residents and reflect the diverse backgrounds of their gardeners, bearing fruits, vegetables, and herbs popular among the Bronx’s Hispanic, African-American, White, and Asian communities. Since its inception, *Bronx Green-Up* has created more than 300 community and school gardens and urban farms throughout the borough.

The New York Botanical Garden welcomes more than 750,000 visitors each year. Approximately one-third of them reside in the Bronx. The Garden views its mission, in part, as using plants to battle hunger, obesity, and declining science learning trends with programs tailored specifically to meet real community needs.

“I offer my congratulations to The New York Botanical Garden on receiving the 2010 National Medal for Museum and Library Service,” said U.S. Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY). “It's a landmark in the community, and has always been ahead of the curve through its cutting-edge research. As a proud, long-time supporter of the Botanical Garden, I'm not at all surprised that the Institute of Museum and Library Services is taking notice.”

“I congratulate The New York Botanical Garden on this well-deserved recognition,” said U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). “It is a shining example of the Garden’s commitment to providing local children with a safe environment to learn during non-school hours. I am proud to support programs dedicated to improving science education and providing young people with safe opportunities to grow and prosper.”

“I would like to congratulate The New York Botanical Garden on its receipt of the 2010 National Medal for Museum and Library Service,” said U.S. Representative Joseph Crowley (NY-07). “This award is a meaningful affirmation of the Garden’s long-standing commitment and service to the Bronx community. Through its many creative initiatives, the Garden demonstrates an extraordinary level of public service as well as a keen understanding of the community’s pressing needs. In addition, the Garden has played an active role in improving the diverse and vibrant neighborhoods that surround its landmark facility. The Bronx is proud to be home to this world-class institution.”

“It is a great honor for our community that the Bronx’s New York Botanical Garden has been awarded a 2010 National Medal for Museum and Library Service,” said Congressman José E. Serrano (NY-16). “The NYBG is a treasured resource in the Bronx, and the acknowledgment of their exemplary service is long overdue. Their mission has been more broadly defined over the years from conservation and horticulture to a wide variety of programs that enrich and enliven our community. We are grateful for their service and applaud them in this moment of well-deserved recognition.”

In addition to The New York Botanical Garden, other recipients of the 2010 National Medal for Museum and Library Service are:

- Conner Prairie Interactive History Park, Fishers, Indiana
- Explora, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi
- Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, California
- Rangeview Library District and Anythink Libraries, Adams County, Colorado
- Peter White Public Library, Marquette, Michigan
- West Bloomfield Township Public Library, West Bloomfield, Michigan
- Patchogue-Medford Library, Patchogue, New York
- Nashville Public Library, Nashville, Tennessee

About the Institute of Museum and Library Services

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute’s mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development. To learn more about the Institute, please visit www.imls.gov.

Any individual may nominate a museum and/or library in the United States and its territories for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service. Members of the National Museum and Library Services Board, the Institute’s presidentially-appointed policy advisory board, review the nominations and make recommendations to the Institute Director who selects the winners. To view nomination information, please go to www.imls.gov/medals. The deadline for 2011 nominations is February 15, 2011.

About The New York Botanical Garden

The New York Botanical Garden has been a vital New York City cultural destination since its founding in 1891. The Garden pursues its mission through its role as a museum of living plant collections arranged in gardens and landscapes across its National Historic Landmark site; through its comprehensive education programs in horticulture and plant science; and through the wide-ranging research programs of the International Plant Science Center.

The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. It is easy to reach by Metro-North Railroad or subway. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit our Web site at www.nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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Images available