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## **Director of Horticulture Jeff Epping Retires from Olbrich Botanical Gardens**

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**MADISON, Wis.** – Jeff Epping will retire as Director of Horticulture at Olbrich Botanical Gardens on February 24, 2023. Epping, a City of Madison employee, has served in the position since 1994.

Throughout Epping’s tenure, the Gardens experienced significant growth in visitors, staff, facilities, and garden spaces; he worked tirelessly to position Olbrich as both a world-class botanical garden and a leader in sustainable horticulture.

“Jeff Epping will forever be a part of Olbrich Botanical Gardens and Madison Parks, leaving an enduring impact at our public garden and beyond. He spearheaded many transformative projects at Olbrich, making it a crown jewel in our park system,” said Madison Parks Superintendent Eric Knepp.

Epping’s career at Olbrich began 28 years ago when he was hired as the director of horticulture and charged with overseeing the design, planting, and maintenance of more than 16 acres of outdoor gardens with increased emphasis on Midwest-hardy plants, sustainable gardening practices, and year-round aesthetic interest.

Prior to starting at Olbrich, Epping spent time at other world-class gardens in North America – seeing what they looked like, how they functioned, and the ways they served their communities. When Epping became the director of horticulture at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, his vision was for Olbrich to become one of those gardens. “With the help of so many wonderful people, I think we’ve created just such a garden,” said Epping. “What this garden has become, from what we started with 28 years ago, I’m proud of it all. I love everything about this place and I always will.”

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During his tenure, Olbrich Botanical Gardens' transformation from a park with a few specialty gardens and lots of grass to a thriving, nationally renowned, sustainable botanical garden was largely due to his vision and gardening philosophies. "With an almost blank canvas, I wanted to create beautiful gardens that were as eco-friendly as possible and work with local, talented, and creative artisans to do so. I also wanted those who supported the Garden to feel proud to be part of it and be inspired by its beauty," Epping continued.

The outdoor gardens saw major transformations from the mid-90s to mid-2000s. From renovating what was once a formal rose mall into the current day Sunken Garden to incorporating a Royal Thai Pavilion and garden into a largely Prairie-style landscape, Epping had a hand in it all. Some of the most impactful transformations came as Epping worked to make the gardens as environmentally friendly as possible. Potential ecosystem impacts, both planet-wide and at the scale of the tiniest insect, are taken into account when planning and maintaining the gardens. In 1997, Epping designed Olbrich's first meadow garden after encountering the style on a trip to England. Since then, a variety of beautiful meadows, rain gardens, and gravel gardens have been added that together support a healthy ecosystem of insects, birds, and other creatures.

"More than any specific project or plant, Jeff's legacy is rooted in his passion, talent, vision, and kindness. His reverence for the natural environment and his ability help others connect to nature is inspiring. He developed a beautiful, natural oasis in an urban environment. He leaves a legacy of unrivaled beautiful and sustainable gardens cared for by a passionate and devoted team. I am forever grateful for Jeff and his time at Olbrich," said Knepp.

After so much time spent with his hands in the dirt, one might assume that Epping is hanging up his trowel and stashing his pruners away for good. Not so. "I am retiring from Olbrich, but not from horticulture since I love what I do and I want to keep helping others create beautiful and environmentally sensitive gardens," he says. "I will continue to consult, design, lecture, travel, bike, hike, and spend more time with family and friends. Sitting still is not what I'm good at, but if I do, maybe I'll write that gravel gardening book I've been thinking about!"

When asked what he will miss most about Olbrich, Epping took a moment to reflect before saying, "Everything. I will miss my super-talented, world-class team of horticulturists, and their creativity, passion, and kindness for each other and everyone around them – that pretty much describes the entire staff at Olbrich and I will miss them all. I will miss all of the people who have supported us through the years in some way, shape, or form. And I will miss walking through these beautiful gardens every day; I never took for granted how lucky I was to get up each day and come to "work" in this amazing place and for that, I will be forever grateful."

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To wish Jeff well in his retirement, send him an email at [jepping@cityofmadison.com](mailto:jepping@cityofmadison.com) or send a note to 3330 Atwood Ave., Madison, WI 53704.

The City of Madison Parks Division, in cooperation with the Olbrich Botanical Society Board of Directors, is preparing to launch a nationwide search for a director of horticulture for the Gardens.

[Olbrich Botanical Gardens](#) is located in Madison, Wisconsin on the shore of Lake Monona at 3330 Atwood Avenue. For more information, call 608-246-4550 or visit Olbrich's website at [www.olbrich.org](http://www.olbrich.org).

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Olbrich Botanical Gardens is operated as a public-private partnership between the City of Madison Parks Division and the non-profit Olbrich Botanical Society.

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