

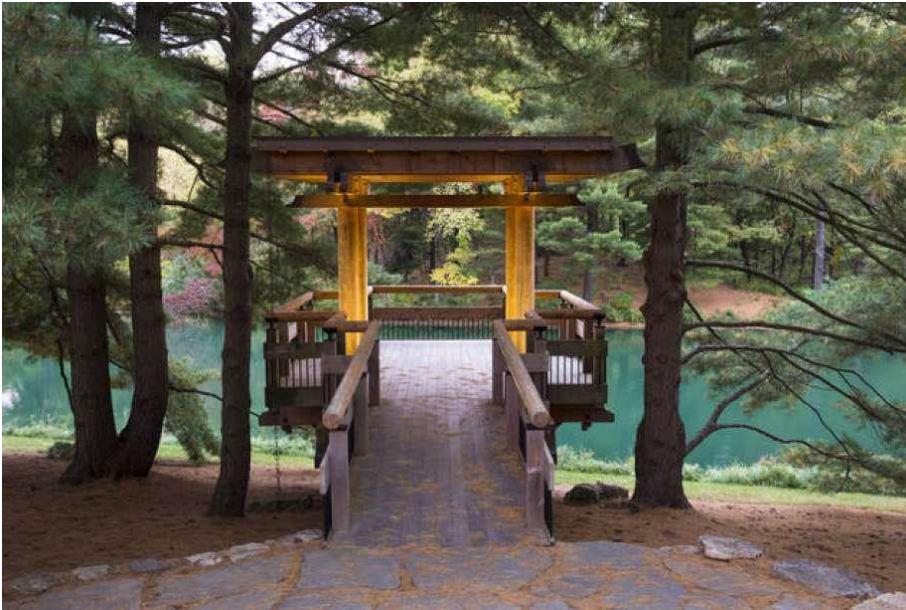
# Segue: The Gardens then and now

Chairperson Smithson talks 'living laboratory' at SIUE

Madelaine Deardeuff

Friday, April 12, 2019

*The Gardens lantern fall morning light showcased in 2013.*



The Gardens at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is described as a living laboratory dedicated to supporting the educational and research mission of the University. Comprising 36 acres, The Gardens are home to a variety of woodlands, ponds, gardens and facilities with a focus on renewable, recycled and sustainably-produced materials.

On this week's episode of Segue, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, sat down with Marion Smithson, Advisory Board chairperson for The Gardens, to discuss its history, what you'll find there and how to get

involved. The duo's conversation will air at 9 a.m. Sunday, April 14 on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound and [siue.edu/wsie](http://siue.edu/wsie).

Smithson received both bachelor's and master's degrees from Miami (Ohio) University, and served as director of the University scholarship programs and associate director of financial aid for 20 years. Afterward, Smithson and her husband moved to Edwardsville, where she began working for SIUE as director of financial aid. Upon retiring, she placed her focus on volunteering at The Gardens and continues to coordinate, maintain, and develop landscapes for SIUE's botanical space.

In giving a brief history of The Gardens, Pembroke tells listeners that The Gardens was established in 1990, and was known as "The Donal Myer Arboretum." Smithson expands on this a little more, explaining that The Gardens was in the University's plans from the very beginning.

"I'm not sure everyone knows this, but it dates back to the '70s when the first maps were put in place," Smithson says. "However by 2004, the master plan was developed and is still in place as our guide for what happens in new development. By 2007, the 'Friends of the Gardens' group began."

SIUE's Gardens were named a Signature Garden by the Missouri Botanical Gardens in its early years, which helped what was then the Donal Myer Arboretum gain recognition. As The Gardens developed, Smithson says, "The Missouri Botanical Gardens ultimately decided to cease the program, because we didn't need to be their fledglings any longer, but they have remained a good resource to The Gardens. There have been times when we've had on-site teachings from staff members of the Botanical Gardens, and we can just pick up the phone and ask someone for answers to questions, so it's a good relationship."

Smithson took classes to be trained as a Master Gardener through University of Illinois' Extension Program, where she went through a semester-long program, followed by an internship. She continues to take classes every year to maintain her certification, as do the other 25 master gardeners or naturalists that work on site.

When asked what she learned as a Master Gardener that she may not have known prior to her certification, Smithson said, "You learn more about soil conditions. You need to know what you're growing your plants in. You need to know how to care for the plants, what plants do well in what locations, and you have to learn to adapt to the environment that you're growing and planting in."

Pembroke asked how The Gardens contend with the deer and geese population on campus. Smithson said that while the geese aren't much of a problem, to combat the deer they simply grow plants that the deer don't like to eat. She laughingly said, "We learned that it's probably best to make the right plant choice, so we don't have to battle the critters all the time!"

The Gardens host a variety of tree and plant species that Smithson says, "you aren't going to find in your backyard or neighborhood simply because we have a number of unusual and older trees in our garden." She continues to let listeners know that, "Many favorites in your home garden won't appear in our gardens, because we have to choose what will do well in the heat and with the different types of animals."

Walking through The Gardens, you'll see attractions such as the Butterfly Garden, the arched wooden bridge, the Japanese Pergola, the Equal 1 Boy Scout Project, the Wind Garden, Shakespeare's Garden, the Prairie Portal Garden and Myer Arboretum. With a vast array of sites to choose from, The Gardens also hosts reunions, weddings and different events throughout the year.

However, in keeping all of these sites maintained, Smithson says that they currently have 25 master gardeners and volunteers who she considers "the heart," of The Gardens. They volunteer their time regularly on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and often on Saturdays and Sundays in the warmer weather.

For people that would like to be involved, Smithson recommends going to the Facebook page by searching "The Gardens at SIUE" for a list of events. Contributions to The Gardens can be made by visiting [siue.edu/gardens](http://siue.edu/gardens). Additionally, if you would like to host an event, you can contact SIUE's Educational Outreach at 618-650-3210.

To hear the entire conversation between Pembroke and Smithson, tune in to Segue at 9 a.m. on Sunday, April 14 on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound and [siue.edu/wsie](http://siue.edu/wsie).