



Penn State breaks ground for H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens

Friday, November 2, 2007

University Park, Pa. -- Penn State officially broke ground Friday (Nov. 2) for Phase I of the H. O. Smith Botanic Gardens -- a long-anticipated step in making The Arboretum at Penn State a reality.

Made possible by a \$10 million gift from Penn State class of 1948 alumnus and State College resident Charles "Skip" Smith, the botanic gardens are named in honor of his late father, a State College contractor and real estate developer and a 1920 graduate of the University.

The gardens will be located on the Mitchell tract, a 56-acre parcel of land along Park Avenue, and will serve as the front door to the larger Arboretum. Construction is now officially under way, with completion of the first phase scheduled for spring 2009.

"The groundbreaking for The Arboretum at Penn State represents the realization of a dream that began in 1914 with the first formal proposal to build an arboretum on campus," said Arboretum Director Kim Steiner. "After nearly a century of intermittent efforts, the good fortune of witnessing this important event has fallen to us as the result of Skip Smith's extraordinary generosity."

The Arboretum is expected to be a major cultural and tourist destination in central Pennsylvania, attracting nearly 200,000 visitors annually.

"The Penn State Arboretum, with its connection to the network of green spaces on campus, will engage us intellectually and physically," said Penn State President Graham Spanier. "It embodies our mission of teaching, research and service, and will further Penn State's efforts in stewardship and conservation in the region."

Last July the University selected the prominent architectural firm MTR Landscape Architects, of Pittsburgh, to begin designing the H. O. Smith Botanic Gardens. Penn State chose MTR following a solicitation of proposals from about a dozen prestigious architectural firms. The University also previously worked with MTR in developing the overall master plan for the Mitchell tract.

Phase I of the H. O. Smith Botanic Gardens will contain several key attractions, including an overlook pavilion and conservatory terrace to allow visitors to view the surrounding arboretum as it is developed, an event lawn, rose and fragrance garden, and horticultural demonstration gardens designed to benefit homeowners and industry. Several of these spaces will be available for private gatherings such as receptions and weddings, and for public events, including festivals, plant sales, and garden shows.

Occupying nearly 400 acres between Park Avenue and the Mount Nittany Expressway, The Arboretum at Penn State will be open to the public. The master plan for the botanic gardens includes plantings of species from around the world and state-of-the-art educational and research facilities. Future plans include a visitors' center, conservatory, and children's education center.

The Arboretum will be almost entirely funded by philanthropic support.

"We have much to do, and more funds to raise, before all of the gardens and the remainder of the Arboretum are finished," said Steiner. "But I cannot imagine a more gratifying task than building the Arboretum, or one that will have a bigger impact on the quality of the University and the community."

Visit <http://www.arboretum.psu.edu> to learn more about The Arboretum at Penn State.

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