



CENTRAL
GARDENS
of NORTH IOWA

2022-2023
STRATEGIC PLAN

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A Brief History of Central Gardens: Central Gardens of North Iowa, Inc. was established on 2.75 acres of ground in the heart of Clear Lake in 2000. It houses over 20 themed gardens and is visited by an estimated 20,000 visitors annually. Its gates are open from May 1–October 31 from dawn to dusk. As the only free public garden space in a 90-mile radius of Clear Lake, it provides an oasis of beauty and serenity for all who enter, as well as hosting over 50 annual events, most offered to the community free of charge. IRS 501 (c)(3) designation was received in 2006. The grounds are maintained almost entirely by a cadre of over 100 volunteers who also plan and host events. Central Gardens is governed by a 15-member board of directors that meets monthly from April through November and conducts business via e-votes during the off season. More information about Central Gardens of North Iowa, Inc., can be found at www.centralgardensnorthiowa.com. This strategic plan contains action steps organized around each of four strategic goals, and is not intended as a business plan. Committee chairs are responsible for overseeing and reporting progress toward the actions to the board of directors on a monthly basis, April through November.

MISSION STATEMENT:

It is the mission of Central Gardens of North Iowa, Inc. to provide a public, intergenerational garden environment that is welcoming, beautiful, calm, educational, recreational, and fun.

SIX COMMITMENTS:

We are committed to: 1. promoting horticultural and environmental stewardship; 2. building the infrastructure through creating a modern garden while honoring our heritage and original design principles; 3. enhancing learning opportunities for members and guests; 4. being inviting to all; 5. being responsible stewards of our resources; and 6. achieving excellence in all that we do.

STRATEGIC GOALS:

We will achieve our six commitments through:

1. Beautifying the Grounds
2. Providing Creative Events and Programming
3. Practicing Rigorous Stewardship of All Our Resources and Ensuring Financial Stability
4. Increasing Engagement with Our Various Publics Through Strategic Marketing, Communication, and Outreach

ACTIONS:

The four strategic goals will be accomplished by achieving the actions specified under each goal.



STRATEGIC GOAL 1: *Beautify the Grounds*

ACTIONS:

1. Continue to have the Design Committee divided into two distinct sub-committees:

- a. Horticulture Committee responsible for overseeing all horticultural aspects of Central Gardens.
- b. Facilities and Equipment responsible for overseeing all building, hardscape, and associated infrastructure.

2. Improve Horticultural aspects of the Gardens.

- a. Refurbishing/Enhancing 2-3 gardens each year for each of the next six years.
- b. Creating an active binder for each of the themed Gardens that includes a narrative of that Garden, map(s) of plant and hardscape elements, and running history of all ascensions and removals by 2022-23.
- c. Adding landscaping around the Little Free Libraries in 2022 to encourage visitor use.
- d. Renaming and redesigning the "Meadow" garden (where Stream Garden is erroneously labeled on the current map-between the first two bridges) in 2023.
- e. Redesigning the existing pollinator area in the Bee Happy Discovery Garden to a children's rock garden by 2023.

3. Support quality infrastructure.

- a. Studying the need for a Shade Sail over the Council Ring in 2022.
- b. Adding seasonal lighting displays each year.
- c. Installing a bench around the bur oak tree to complete the original design plan for that area by 2023.

4. Add a significant piece of artwork or aesthetic interest into the Gardens by 2027.

5. Establish a Volunteer Coordinator position to support and communicate with our many volunteers in 2022.

6. Explore the idea of adding a permanent bocce ball court to the activity lawn in 2022.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: *Provide Creative Events and Programming*

1. Support the Arts annually through:

- a. Offering Picnics and Performances, and a Cultural Heritage Celebration, featuring various types of performing arts.
- b. Collaborating with the Clear Lake Arts Center to co-host a Plein Air Painting Event in the Gardens.
- c. Incorporating the arts into Fresh on Friday's youth activities, collaborating with at least two different entities, and involving at least two different types of arts.
- d. Organizing a community-wide pumpkin carving/decorating event/display, beginning in October of 2022.

2. Support Education annually through:

- a. Including an educational component in each program/event when possible. At a minimum, this should include the Plant Sale & Gardening Fair, Fresh on Fridays, Cultural Heritage Celebration, and Preservation Celebration.
- b. Providing a 3 to 4 session Garden Lecture Series in collaboration with ISU Extension.
- c. Providing at least 12 educational postings on social media.
- d. Providing learning and experiential opportunities for youth with a focus on the areas of food, plants, gardening, pollinators and environment during Fresh on Fridays and collaborating with at least three other organizations to provide these diverse learning opportunities. (For example, Healthy Harvest of North Iowa, Lime Creek Nature Center, etc.)
- e. Providing interactive learning and gardening opportunities for youth in grades three and up through the Growing Green Gardeners programs. (Bugs and Blooms will involve youth in grades 3-5 and Harvest-Unite-Gather-Share (HUGS) will involve youth in grades 6 and up).
- f. Holding a ticketed Botanical Mixology class at least once throughout the summer with the intended audience being those persons 21 years of age and older.
- h. Offering a short-term public exhibit at least once every two years in the Gardens.
- i. Providing two seasonal bird walks through the Gardens, beginning in Spring 2022.

3. Promote Diversity and Inclusion annually by:

- a. Offering a cultural heritage event that celebrates the contributions of ethnic culture to north Iowa.
- b. Providing an event/program, specifically targeted for the elderly, coordinating with at least one area assisted living facility or nursing home. Consideration should be given to making this intergenerational if possible.

4. Provide Recreational Opportunities annually by:

- a. Offering Golf Croquet weekly in the Gardens as an organized activity for individuals and families. A limited supply of equipment will be provided.
- b. Providing a garden-themed corn hole board and bags for visitors to play on the Activity Lawn whenever the Gardens are open.
- c. Offering 12 or more sessions of a line dancing class open to all ages.
- d. Collaborating with Healthy Harvest, North Iowa Fresh, and local farmers to provide a ticketed Fall Farm to Fork dinner, beginning in 2022.
- e. Celebrating summer and local eating establishments by offering a Picnic Basket Auction, beginning summer of 2023.

5. Provide CGNI's hallmark annual events, upholding our tradition of continuity of excellence by annually:

- a. Hosting the Plant Sale and Gardening Fair in May. This offers opportunities for participants of all ages to learn about gardening and purchase donated plants and other garden-related items, as well as items available from area vendors.
- b. Offering Fresh on Friday's programming during the months of June, July, and August where volunteers create bouquets from the garden that are available for purchase through a designated donation amount. The Gardens will provide refreshments, a space for visitors to socialize, and educational activities in the Bee Happy Discovery Garden for children and adults. We will partner with at least three other entities to provide activities as well as acquaint the public with the services they provide.
- c. Hosting the Summer Garden Party, our annual fundraiser, in June. Components of this event will include an auction, food, and music. The public is invited and admission will be charged.
- d. Offering Picnics and Performances each Sunday evening for 8 weeks, beginning in July of each year. These hour-long free concerts or other performances feature local talent. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own lawn chair, beverage, and picnic.
- e. Offering a free Preservation Celebration in September to educate and equip the greater north Iowa community to preserve its culture, environment, and food.

STRATEGIC GOAL 3: *Practice Wise Stewardship of All Our Resources and Ensure Financial Stability*

ACTIONS:

- 1. Continue to grow Central Gardens' endowments every year as financial conditions permit by:**
 - a. Directing excess funds to an endowment at year end with consideration given to the following year's needs, as recommended by the Finance Committee.
 - b. Directing one-half of any donation over \$10,000, not specified for a particular use, to an endowment as recommended by the finance committee.
 - c. Sending any donation specifically designated for the permanent endowment to the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa for deposit in the Central Gardens permanent endowment account in a timely manner.
- 2. Increase projected net revenue of major events (Plant Sale, Fresh on Fridays, Summer Garden Party, and Picnics and Performances) by at least 10% annually.**
- 3. Increase donations, honoraria, and memorials made by individuals and corporations by at least 10 percent by marketing and promoting donor options in 2022-2023.**
- 4. Increase individual memberships by 10% in 2022 and 2023.**
- 5. Conduct a brick campaign each year that targets a specific audience with a developed theme. Increase net revenue from brick and paver sales by at least 10% annually in 2022 and 2023.**
- 6. Promote Central Gardens of North Iowa as a recipient of estate planning efforts with appropriate audiences and by marketing and publicizing estate planning and giving options by newsletter, website, and social media.**
- 7. Raise funds through grants of \$15,000 in 2022 and \$20,000 in 2023.**
- 8. Develop and maintain a liquidity reserve of 75% of the annual budgeted operating expenses using an average of the prior 3 years' results to ensure available funds for day to day operations in challenging financial environments.**

STRATEGIC GOAL 4: *Increase Engagement with Our Various publics Through Strategic Marketing, Communication, and Outreach*

ACTIONS:

1. Use conventional media weekly and social media at least three times per week annually during the gates open season and periodically during the off season to publicize Central Gardens' news, promotions (e.g. a special brick sales campaign), special features (children's book library), and rental opportunities to a wide audience.
2. Increase individual membership numbers by 10% for 2022 and 2023.
3. Increase corporate membership numbers by 50% for 2022 and 2023.
4. Target photographers as a new demographic of corporate members, and develop a photography policy that provides specific guidance regarding respectful use of the Gardens as a photography venue in 2022-2023. Our goal is to add 5 corporate memberships.
5. Intentionally recruit persons of diverse demographic backgrounds to positions on the board of directors, committees, staff, and volunteer cadres.
6. Annually evaluate the content and structure of the new website developed in early 2021 and make recommendations for improvements as needed. Post videos of at least five events that have occurred at the Gardens in 2021 as a marketing strategy.
7. Host a "Get to Know the Gardens" social, for summer residents, at which membership in the Gardens is promoted in 2022.
8. Build on the north Iowa aspect of Central Gardens, reaching out and marketing to surrounding communities with annual campaigns.

