

Unknown

Welcome to Rooted in People. The human side of public gardens. Public gardens are more than beautiful views and carefully curated plants. They enrich communities and the lives of their employees. In this podcast series, we, the 2024 2025 cohort of the Longwood Gardens Fellows Program, will engage in conversations with leaders of public gardens. We will explore how their garden has cultivated these communities.

00;00;33;12 - 00;00;46;13 Unknown

We invite you to grab your headphones and listen in to this series full of inspiration, insight, and reflection that may transform your perspective on the garden world around you.

00;00;46;13 - 00;00;50;10 Laurel

Hello, I'm Laurel Dunning with the Longwood Gardens Fellows program.

00;00;50;11 - 00;01;18;08

Today I have the pleasure of speaking with Ed Moydell, president and CEO of Holden Forest and Gardens, which includes the Holden Arboretum in Kirtland, Ohio, and the Cleveland Botanical Garden. Ed is a seasoned leader in the public garden world with over 15 years of strategic leadership experience. Before joining Holden, he served over 13 years as president and CEO of Bloedel Reserve, a public garden and forest preserve near Seattle.

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also played a key role in developing a research and education center dedicated to public garden excellence. Like me, Ed is a graduate of the Longwood Fellows Program, which has helped shape leaders in our field. Welcome to the podcast!

Ed

Thanks so much, Laurel. I'm thrilled to be here with you, and I appreciate the invitation. Well, I'm thrilled to be here with you, too.

00;01;42;10 - 00;02;05;03 Laurel

We spoke last month in our interview for a case study on Holden Forest and Gardens (HFG) for our cohort project on social sustainability. And we spoke extensively about compensation and pay equity. I would like for you to talk about that topic in this interview and share about some of the other exciting initiatives you have implemented and are developing at hold in forests and gardens. Please tell us what prompted your garden's compensation adjustment initiative and the results so far?

00;02;05;05 - 00;02;41;20 Ed

Sure, I'd be happy to. So, like many organizations, we do an annual employee engagement survey. And so that started that initiative started about six years ago. I got here about 18 months ago. And in some recent employee engagement surveys, wages had been identified as an issue that we wanted to advance in the organization. And in 2022, when it showed up as a priority for staff, my predecessor in the leadership team decided to prioritize investing in a compensation study to determine how competitive

we were and what efforts we would need to make. So we worked with an outside consultant, to devise the study. And, that consultant used multiple data points and survey sources to get compensation information.

00;03;15;18 - 00;03;44;19 Ed

They worked with us to create a compensation philosophy that reflected our values as an organization. They also created job families of types of positions across the organization. Based off of, different or, I guess, similar types of, skills, job responsibilities, and so forth. And they grouped them to similar categories. And then developed, particular skills.

00;03;44;21 - 00;04;12;24

That positioned the job families throughout the organization. And this was all based off of having internal equity, wage equity within the organization. And competitiveness within the external market. So that was something that had been identified in 2022. Then the effort took part of 2022 and then a portion of 2023.

00;04;12;26 - 00;04;39;03

And then I arrived in, September of 2023. And so the work was done when I got here. And it was actually at the first all staff meeting that I attended that the results of that were announced to the staff. And I think that, we've been talking about it, as an organization with the employees for several months.

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And I think when the outcome was communicated to people, I think people were expecting more. And I think that they were expecting more not only in terms of what the wage impact might be, but I think also more information, just to help them understand what the process was, what the impacts were, and sort of how we arrived at things.

00;05;06;08 - 00;05;31;11

And we, I think after that announcement, we quickly became aware that we needed to focus on that and to advance the issue quickly. And so the the outcome of it was that with the study, they determined that there was a gap between where we were and where we needed to be in order to be, competitive with the outside market.

00;05;31;13 - 00;05;53;29

And we weren't in a position to be able to afford to do that all at once. So it was phased over the course of three years. And I think when it was, communicated to staff, I think some people had expectations it was going to happen more quickly or it may be a higher increase. And so that I think when we heard back from people, we realized that that was something we really needed to prioritize.

00;05;54;01 - 00;06;19;12

And so what we ended up doing was, I referred to it sort of as a broken record of verify, clarify, and expedite. So we needed to verify the information that we had received. We needed to clarify that to people, and actively communicate it to them. And we needed to expedite making progress on this.

00;06;19;13 - 00;06;41;09

And so that was sort of the framework for continuing on with it. So some major things that we did, we hired an independent consultant to verify the findings that we had, make sure that the information that we had from the different data sources was correct. See if there were any adjustments that needed to be made.

00;06;41;12 - 00;07;04;16

We also formed a compensation and benefits task force of the board, to go in and to advise us on the information that we were receiving and make sure that we were, moving forward, in a thoughtful and comprehensive way. And using both the advice from that group and the findings from the independent consultant.

00;07;04;19 - 00;07;28;00

We then worked to clarify the ranges, of the different job families and the architecture of the overall, compensation system and then also the individual placement of employees on it. And then the goal at that point was that we would be able to sit down with every employee and explain to them, this is the job family that you're in.

00;07;28;02 - 00;07;51;27

This is why you're in that job family. This is the range that your position is in. And here is where you are in that range based off of all of these different factors. And the factors are things like, skills, tenure, educational credentials, all of those. But to be able to sit down and sort of, be able to answer all of the common questions that employees would have.

00;07;51;29 - 00;08;15;15

And to do that in a really consistent way. And then, the final, thing and I think a really important thing was that we expedited, the implementation of the study from three years down to two. So we worked to reallocate some strategic funding, to prioritize a second wave of wage increases that first year.

00;08;15;17 - 00;08;41;03

And then we also worked into this year's budget the final wage adjustments, along with regular wage increases for staff too. And I think what that did was really demonstrate to staff that this was a priority, and to let them know that we had listened and that we were really working to make progress on this as a priority for the organization.

00;08;41;05 - 00;09;12;03 Laurel:

Wow. That is really comprehensive and holistic. And it sounds like in the way that you were able to expedite it by allocating money that was going to go somewhere else as, you must have had to work closely with the board to be able to do that. I would imagine.

Ed:

Yes, very much so. And I think we were in alignment that that was, just a really critical priority for us.

00;09;12;05 - 00;09;40;28 Laurel

Yes. I imagine, because in the end we are all working for the money, so the staff is a little disgruntled because they're expecting more and they're not seeing it when they thought they would. That's a pretty big deal. And how are the results so far, do you think that you are seeing a big difference in morale because you expedited this?

Ed: Yes, I, I definitely think so.

00;09;41;01 - 00;10;18;16

And I think that, you know, here at Holden before us and gardens were focused on, I think, a comprehensive view and definition of the employee experience. And we really want to be an employer of choice. And a critical piece of that is paying people fairly, you know, paying fair wages. And I think that that was our goal with this, with expediting it, is that we could be at a place where we were able to say, that we are, you know, based off of, you know, the definition and the philosophy and all of this work that we're paying people fairly.

00;10;18;18 - 00;11;00;17

And that's also one it's one component of that complete employee experience. But you also really have to have the the culture right. You have to have the work environment, right. You have to have the different types of development opportunities right. But I think that unless you have critical things like, wage equity, that is, there's only so far that you'd be able to get with that complete employee experience if you're not able to be where you really need to be on that, but I think that we've seen a really positive impact on morale, both from this, as

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well as the other, priorities that we developed around the employee experience.

Laurel:

Wow. That's wonderful. And I remember when we talked last month, you said that it was really important that what you implemented would be you would have the resources to sustain it.

Ed:

Yes. I think that's really it's really important.

00;11;24;00 - 00;11;46;01

And I think also that's, was an important message, to people that, we all work, in support of the common goals, and that we're in it together, to be able to ensure that all of these positive changes or things that we can continue to sustain on in the future, we all have a role in that.

00;11;46;04 - 00;12;14;00 Laurel:

Definitely. Wow. That's wonderful. And if any listeners want more information about the compensation adjustment, please go to the Fellow's website and you can read the case study from my interview with Ed last month for more details. And also, when we spoke last month, you discussed several ways that hold enforcing gardens is addressing social sustainability in Cleveland, the poorest city in the United States. Given the significant challenges faced by the communities your garden serves, such as access to shelter, food, water, and meaningful jobs. Holden Forests and Gardens focuses on reducing barriers to access, creating job opportunities, and supporting staff with sustainable careers. Can you please tell us a little more about how Holden Forest and Gardens is creating these job opportunities?

00;12;39;07 - 00;13;05;04 Ed

Sure. We I think we addressed this in a few different ways when it comes to job opportunities. We have been focused on workforce development for several years across our campuses. And we have two main programs that are dedicated to that. The first one is called Green Core. And that is a paid program for high school students.

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And we have about 40 that go through every year. They're mostly students from, Cleveland Metropolitan, School District. And they have an immersion in, sort of a broad exposure to different types of careers in the green industry. And then they have focused time within one of many departments, including science research, education, conservation, horticulture, to get to know what types of job opportunities there are in a place like ours.

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And in addition to some of those harder skills, they also get soft skills; communication skills, interviewing skills, resume building skills. And I think just the importance of working with different people in different departments in the public. So that's something that's been around, in a few different, forms for about 20 years.

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And its latest iteration for about five years. The second program that we have is called Tree Corps, and that's for underemployed adults, and underemployed, meaning that they have work, but they've sort of reached a plateau, in terms of earning power. And they're not able to have economic mobility to sort of improve the situation for themselves and their families.

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So this is a program that is also paid, and funded through, grants and donations. And it's, serves older students, usually in their 20s, 30s, and they have an immersive experience in what it's like to be a professional arborist. And they work with us on our campuses. They also work out in local communities, planting trees, caring for trees.

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And when they graduate, they become, really viable candidates for roles with them, with us, and our tree care department, but also for organizations like, Davey Tree or Bartlett Tree, or other professional arborist companies. So on the workforce development front, that's how we are serving the community with job creation.

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We also have an extensive internship program where we serve about 25 students a year. And they fulfill meaningful roles in basically every department within the organization to get that practical experience at a professional, nonprofit organization.

Laurel:

Wow. That's wonderful. And do you hear back from many of these students? Do they keep in touch or, you know, come back later and say, my life has been really changed by this program and do you get any of that kind of feedback?

00;15;49;21 - 00;16;16;11 Ed:

Yeah, most definitely. And I think one that stuck with me the most was we had an intern several years ago who was in our curatorial department, who is now the assistant curator at the Cambridge Botanical Garden in the UK. And we took a trip to the UK over the summer, and she gave us a tour of the of their, property.

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And she said that the experience there, really made her want to work in botanical gardens, and that she really credited her experience with our staff, inspiring her on the career path that she's in. So that's the sort of thing that doesn't happen very often. But when it does, it's that was really, really meaningful. And then, on a more local level, there have been people that have been through our internship programs who, they've come back and they've been employees for our organization.

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And then people within Green Corps and Tree Corps have become employees at partner organizations. So that that's really what you hope will happen. And it's been great to see that.

Laurel:

That is so wonderful. Wow. What great programs. Another thing you mentioned last time we spoke is a project that is currently in the works, and I'm excited to hear more about it.

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It's regarding access to the Cleveland Botanic Garden. Can you introduce us to this exciting initiative?

Ed:

Yeah, sure. I think I think one of the things that we try to do here, at our organization is to reduce barriers to access and encourage really anybody to experience the wonders of nature and to connect with our properties.

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And so we have programs like we participate in museums for all, it's a dollar admission. And we also have an access membership that provides a heavily discounted membership for folks that may have more limited incomes. And I think that's a really good start. One project that we're working on here physically is at the Cleveland Botanical Garden.

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We're located right in the center of University Circle, which is actually the highest concentration of cultural institutions in the entire United States, which I didn't know. And I think a lot of people didn't know. But the botanical garden, it's an 11 acre urban oasis that's right in the center of everything. But honestly, it's hidden in plain sight.

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And a lot of that has to do with how the landscapes have grown up over time. And I think the messages that we communicate to the community are not necessarily the ones that we want to. We want to be vibrant and welcoming and exciting. And really, that messaging starts at the outside. So one of the things that we're looking into now is the development of a community loop.

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That would be on the perimeter of the property, about three quarters of a mile all the way around. And the development of several key dynamic, seasonally changing landscapes that would be immersive, that are on the outside of the pay wall, so that everybody in the community could experience them. And that means, people in the neighborhood, we're across the street from Case Western Reserve University, University Hospitals, Cleveland Clinic.

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So students, professors, doctors, tourists, really anybody who's in the neighborhood, would walk by, see something pretty cool on the outside, get immersed in nature, and then hopefully look inside and want to come in and visit us. But hopefully this can be something that can, I think the first time you see the garden, can help set people up to think of it as a really interesting space, that they belong to, that they belong in and that they really want to get involved in.

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So that's something that I think the concept of it's out there. And we'll be working over the next several months to get a sense of, what it will actually look like. But we're really excited about it.

Laurel:

That is really exciting. And I think that's something that a lot of public gardens and botanical gardens, struggle with is just, the access to community awareness of, "this is for you. Come, come in and immerse yourself in it".

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And just the how helpful it is, for mental health and especially in urban areas and all those surrounding communities that you described, like you need to get out of that classroom or out of that hospital and go, go be in nature and immerse yourself and, you know, get into this space.

Ed:

Yeah, it's really critical.

00;20;44;05 - 00;21;12;07

And I think that it also relates back to our founding mission. The Cleveland Botanical Garden was founded in 1930, and it was actually the country's very first civic garden. And the whole idea behind it was that Cleveland was the third and third or fourth biggest city in the United States at the time. And there was a group of volunteers that got together to create, a place that people could go and learn about, plants, trees and horticulture.

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Take that back to their communities and make them better and healthier. 100 years later, the world is vastly different. And we think people need nature more than ever. But what does it mean to be a civic garden or an urban garden in the 21st century? And how is that represented in the landscapes and how you, you know, kind of show up on the outside of the community?

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So this is something that we think will help us go back to our roots, but in a modern way. And also set the tone for who we are as an organization to people when they see us.

Laurel:

Wow. That's incredible. And it's just wonderful to hear all this amazing work that you and your team are doing there.

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And I'm really grateful that you're sharing it with us and all the listeners on the podcast. You've activated so many initiatives on the social sustainability front and many other initiatives as well. And I recently learned something about you. In addition to your horticulture and public garden expertise, I understand you know your way around the Teppanyaki Grill.

Ed: it's true.

00;22;24;27 - 00;22;46;22

Laurel:

Do you ever cook Korean BBQ for your family or your staff?

Ed:

Well, yeah. So I, I put myself through college as a Benihana style hibachi chef. And I did that in, I grew up in Oklahoma and Tulsa, and I worked at a restaurant called Shogun in Tulsa for seven years, and it's how I put myself through school.

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And so I did that, and then, you know, hung up my hat. But when I applied for my last job at Bloedel Reserve, they asked if I had any creative fundraising ideas. And completely as a joke, I told them, you know I used to do this. I have my hat, my knives, my scarf, buy me a grill, and, you know, we'll do these fundraising dinners.

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And I wasn't serious, but after I got the job, one of the board members called and he said, you know, I know you were joking, but that's actually kind of a good idea. So he and his wife bought me the grill. And we ended up using it at Bloedel for fundraising purposes.

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And, over the course of about ten years, we raised about \$750,000 doing it, which went back into the gardens and our horticultural staff, and when I left, they were kind enough to actually give me the grill. So I have it here in Cleveland. I've yet to develop a market for it. But it's on my back patio, and we're working to, you know, make a new, hibachi presence in Cleveland.

00;23;48;25 - 00;24;13;05 Laurel

Wow. That's incredible. Well, I hope I get to experience that when you do.

Ed: I would love to have you over.

Thank you, Ed. Well, thank you so much for your time today and enlightening us all about all these initiatives you're doing, and the great work at Holden Forest and Gardens.

Ed: Well, thank you so much for having me as a part of this.

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Really appreciate you and the fellows and the work that you're doing to highlight the importance of these efforts.

Laurel: Well, thank you. I appreciate you saying that. All right. Take care. Ed.

Ed: You too. Thanks. Bye bye.

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This podcast has been produced by Carol Gross, Mariah Kaltenstein, Laurel Dunning, Vania Pereira,

00;27;08;08 - 00;27;12;02 Unknown

Anastasia Sallen, Clare Shearman, and Yvette Weaver.

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If you're interested in learning more about the 2024 Fellows Project and Workbook, there are links in the show notes with more information.

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The Longwood Fellows Program is a unique leader development program in the fields of public horticulture. Until next time, keep your hands in the soil your heartfelt and be inspired by gardens