



PHS

PENNSYLVANIA
HORTICULTURAL
SOCIETY®



Annual Report

2024 - 2025

Letter from the President



Dear PHS Community,

As I reflect on this past year, I am struck by how essential our work together has become. In a time when communities everywhere seek connection, health, and hope, your support ensures that the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society is not only a source of beauty and joy, but also a driving force for stronger, more resilient, and connected neighborhoods across our region.

The PHS Philadelphia Flower Show remains a powerful symbol of that impact. What began in 1829 with a single-day exhibition now unites more than 200,000 people each year in celebration of creativity and shared purpose. This year, we also honor the remarkable legacy of the late Deb Donaldson, whose passion for horticulture and generous vision transformed lives and strengthened community. Her story reminds us that individuals with deep commitment can change not only gardens, but entire communities.

Our Healthy Neighborhoods work demonstrates this truth every day. Throughout the Philadelphia region, residents, partners, and PHS supporters are turning vacant land into welcoming green spaces, helping develop and support our local workforce, planting trees that improve public health, and cultivating gardens that nourish both body and spirit. These efforts show that greening is not just about planting, it is about elevating communities with pride, resilience, and opportunity.

From iconic public gardens and landscapes along the Parkway to our beloved Pop Up Gardens, your support ensures that our region itself flourishes. These places are not just beautiful, they are vital. They provide safe, welcoming spaces, foster economic vitality, and beautifully strengthen the social fabric that holds our communities together.

As you read this annual report, I hope you see your own role reflected in every story of impact. Together, we are proving that gardening is not only joyful, it is an essential tool for building a healthier, more connected future for all.

With gratitude,

Matt Rader

President, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

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PHS by the Numbers

For nearly 200 years, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society has shown that when you plant something, you spark change. From gardens, trees, and green spaces to hands-on programs, trainings, and community events, we bring people together, create healthier neighborhoods, and keep our region beautiful and thriving in every season. At PHS, we believe the power of plants can grow stronger communities and a greener, more connected future for everyone.



The PHS Philadelphia Flower Show

Sowing a Harvest Unseen

REMEMBERING DEB DONALDSON

The organizers of America's first public flower show in 1829 could never have dreamed that their day-long exhibition in Philadelphia would grow into the nation's largest and longest running horticultural event. Yet even that very first Philadelphia Flower Show had a lasting impact on American horticulture all its own, introducing the public to the Mexican tropical plant *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, now widely known and loved as the poinsettia. In every age, there are individuals whose passion, vision, and generosity shape the future of our communities and our world. The late Debra Donaldson was one such force whose untold influence on PHS and the Flower Show will be felt for generations.



HOOKED ON HORTICULTURE

"I've always loved horticulture," Deb said in an earlier interview. "My mom loved gardening, and I have always loved and appreciated plants as she did." A prolific exhibitor in the Show's Horticulture Division for more than 20 years, Deb embodied excellence, earning an astounding 561 blue ribbons, 56 special awards, and numerous accolades. Whether showcasing her flair for cultivating succulents and cacti, serving on the Flower Show and Events Committee, mentoring newcomers, or feeding the Flower Show community her fabulous cooking, Deb exemplified the very best of PHS. In 2024, PHS honored Deb with its highest award, the PHS Distinguished Medal of Achievement.

Deb first connected with PHS in the late 1980s attending Flower Show Preview Parties with friends. In 2003 she entered the Flower Show for the first time, encouraged by her friend and mentor, the late Mrs. Dorrance H. Hamilton. Deb enjoyed early success that year, winning a blue ribbon among other awards. Mrs. Hamilton also introduced Deb to former PHS President Jane Pepper, who encouraged Deb in her passion as well. In turn, Deb motivated and inspired countless others to get involved in PHS, the Flower Show, and the wonders of horticulture.

AN INSPIRING MENTOR

"I can say from personal experience that it was Deb who first encouraged me to enter the Flower Show, bought me two plants, and supported me through the grooming and entry process," PHS President Matt Rader shared with the PHS community in an email after Deb's passing in January 2025. "She was also a constant champion for me, my work, and for all of us in the PHS community. Her warm, generous mentorship helped draw out the best in each of us and build community." An enthusiastic ambassador for the Flower Show and PHS's horticulture classes, Deb recruited and mentored countless Flower Show entrants over the years. Her engaging workshops were invaluable resources for novice and veteran exhibitors alike, and the recording of her thorough tutorial on how to enter the Show and prepare entries for display continues to guide new entrants. Deb also engaged with the region's gardening community through her longtime membership in the Philadelphia Cactus and Succulent Society as well as The Gardeners Garden Club, which is a founding member club of the national Garden Club of America, an organization composed of 200 member garden clubs with over 18,000 members.



"PHS does so much work that people aren't even aware of. It's so much more than the Flower Show."

— Deb Donaldson

A GENEROUS VISIONARY

Deb's love for PHS extended beyond the Flower Show, and she wholeheartedly championed our mission to bring beauty, community, and equity to the Philadelphia region. A longtime and generous donor with her husband John, Deb ensured her passion would continue to benefit PHS's vital programs for generations to come through a bequest in her will. "PHS is making Philadelphia a better community for people from all backgrounds," Deb once said. "It makes me feel good that everyone ... can feel the impact of PHS's programs." "Our hearts are with Deb's devoted husband, John, her daughter, Elizabeth, and her whole family," Matt wrote. "While we grieve the loss of such a remarkable person, let us also remember the joy she brought to so many through her love of horticulture, her commitment to community, and her belief in the power of beauty to transform lives."

A Herald of Hope

The 235,000 people who attended the 2025 Philadelphia Flower Show, *Gardens of Tomorrow* will likely remember the sense of hope and renewal conveyed by the Show's stunning works of art. But for many behind the scenes, 2025 will go down in PHS history as the year attendance reached pre-pandemic levels, a major milestone for any event and an exciting springboard for the future. The 2025 Show also attracted a younger, broader, more family-oriented audience than in years past; featured new and more diverse exhibitors; expanded its focus on local high school and university participants; and welcomed four international floral designers in a new category poised for growth. That's promising news for this storied tradition.



Healthy Neighborhoods

A Passion for People and Plants

"Etzi" occupies a gap in the sidewalk outside Beth Zion Beth Israel's preschool in the Rittenhouse section of Philadelphia. A variation on a Hebrew word that loosely translates as "Little Tree," Etzi is the name the preschoolers gave the Honey Locust that PHS Tree Tenders helped them plant in the empty cutout in 2021. The children tended the sapling by sprinkling it regularly with watering cans. But it was Dr. Toba Kerson—recruited by fellow congregant Eileen Dwell—who ensured that Etzi routinely got a deeper drink from a hose.

"Plants and flowers are really a part of Toba's DNA," admires her husband Dr. Larry Kerson, who says he assists with the "unskilled labor" for Toba's gardening endeavors. For 37 years, Toba could let her gardening passion run wild on the couple's 1.25-acre Bryn Mawr property, even expanding her collection of daylilies to 60 varieties.

In 2013 the Kersons relocated to Center City Philadelphia, when Toba retired from her career as a social work professor at Bryn Mawr College and Larry from his private practice as a neurologist. Now Toba feeds her fervor for plants by cultivating a community garden plot along the Schuylkill River, maintaining three formerly neglected planters outside their synagogue, and serving as the liaison between their condo board and its landscaping contractor.

While Toba has been a regular at the Philadelphia Flower Show since her graduate school days at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1970s, it's the urban greening work that the Show fuels—from growing the tree canopy and providing educational programming to beautifying the city and building strong community bonds—that matters most to the Kersons. Longtime PHS members, the couple decided to increase their support for PHS when they reassessed their charitable giving after retiring.

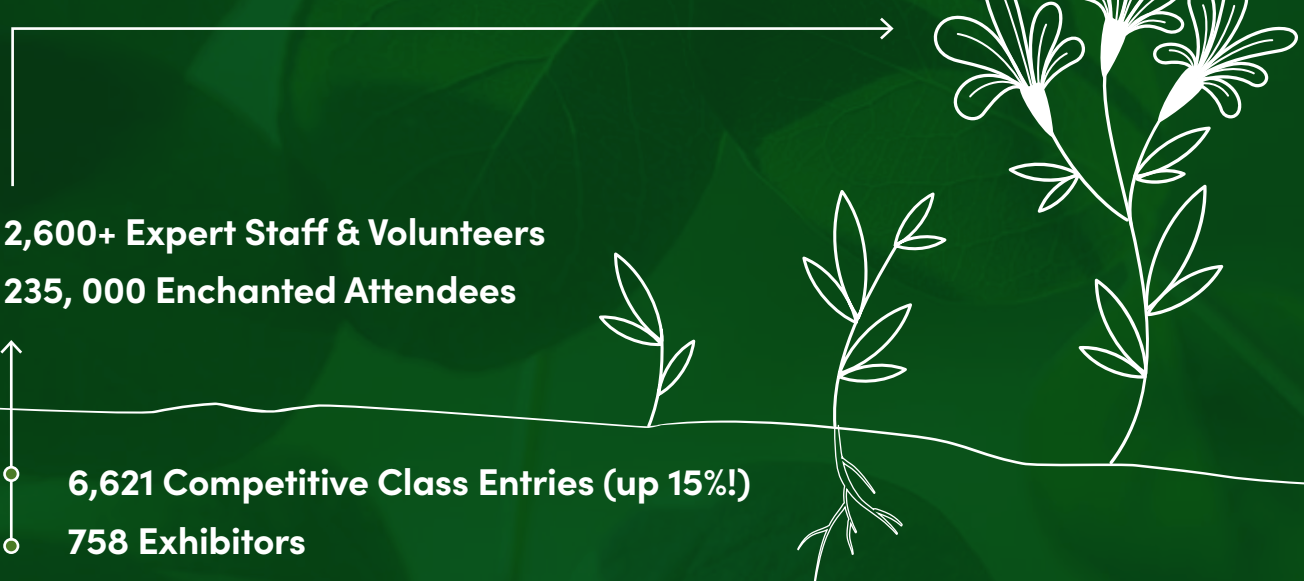
"We chose to focus our giving on PHS's community gardens because it brings people together; strengthens communities; addresses needs in less affluent areas; and involves and supports people of every age, income, level of education, and ethnic and cultural background," Toba says. "Food and flower gardens are natural community builders. They are points of pride for individuals and neighborhoods, and they beautify and enrich the City of Philadelphia. Our small financial contribution is just a drop in the bucket," Toba humbly concludes, "but we are proud to be able to help."

"We chose to focus our giving on PHS's community gardens because it brings people together; strengthens communities; addresses needs in less affluent areas; and involves and supports people of every age, income, level of education, and ethnic and cultural background."

— Dr. Toba Kerson



A World-Class Horticulture Event





PLANNED BY RESIDENTS

Toba and Larry's support includes a multiyear pledge for the new greening approach PHS has been piloting in North Philadelphia's Nicetown and Tioga neighborhoods, which the couple toured in its early stages. In 2020, the innovative model began engaging community members in creating a cohesive neighborhood greening plan that taps all of PHS's Healthy Neighborhoods resources, including community garden support, tree planting and care, vacant lot greening and maintenance, and workforce development.

In 2022, PHS and the Nicetown and Tioga communities started implementing the resulting three-year plan, Love Where You Live, which successfully concluded its first phase in August of 2025. In addition to its achievements cleaning and greening the community, the initiative created 3,615 daily green jobs over three years and organized a number of community engagement events, such as farmer markets offering free produce grown in the community gardens by residents. Efforts to continue the initiative are underway, with funding from the William Penn Foundation for Phase II already in place.

"This is not a matter of gentrification, but of letting the people who are there take control of their gardens, without bulldozers moving in to make room for people with a lot of money. It's a more sustainable model," observes Larry. "PHS's work there is all about building community, and that's so important to both of us."

CLEANED FOR THE COMMUNITY

On a recent tour of PHS's Healthy Neighborhoods work, Toba and Larry had an opportunity to revisit some of the Nicetown and Tioga sites they saw at the program's launch. "When you drive down the street, you can literally see the difference," the Kersons report. "There are abandoned lots that have been cleaned up, with grass and shrubs and perennials. PHS isn't simply going in and getting tin cans or needles or worse out. They've made the plots into these lovely welcoming spaces."

Vacant lot transformations like these are driven by the PHS LandCare program, a partnership with the City of Philadelphia. More than 20 years strong, LandCare now maintains nearly a third of Philadelphia's vacant land, including more than 1.2 million square feet across 643 vacant lots in Nicetown and Tioga alone (almost 21 football fields worth of land!). LandCare has historically run April through October. But in 2025, the city increased funding to make LandCare a year-round initiative for the more than 12,000 total lots that PHS oversees, a testament to the program's impact and community support.

In addition to its environmental contributions, LandCare provides a significant number of jobs for people across Philadelphia, many of whom received training through PHS Workforce Development. An important pathway for overcoming employment barriers, Workforce Development provides trainees with education, employment, and job placement in horticulture, landscaping, and tree care, graduating 56 individuals in the 2025 fiscal year alone.



Grown with Love

Another before-and-after that impressed the Kersons was a community garden on the vacant lot adjacent to the home of nurse Estelle Vaughn, a driving force in Nicetown and Tioga, whom Toba praises as "a powerhouse for the community."

"One of the amazing things about gardens is that they keep changing," Toba notes. "This one changed for the better. They had more plantings. Everything looked robust and cared for. You could just see what was going to happen over time with love and care for that garden."

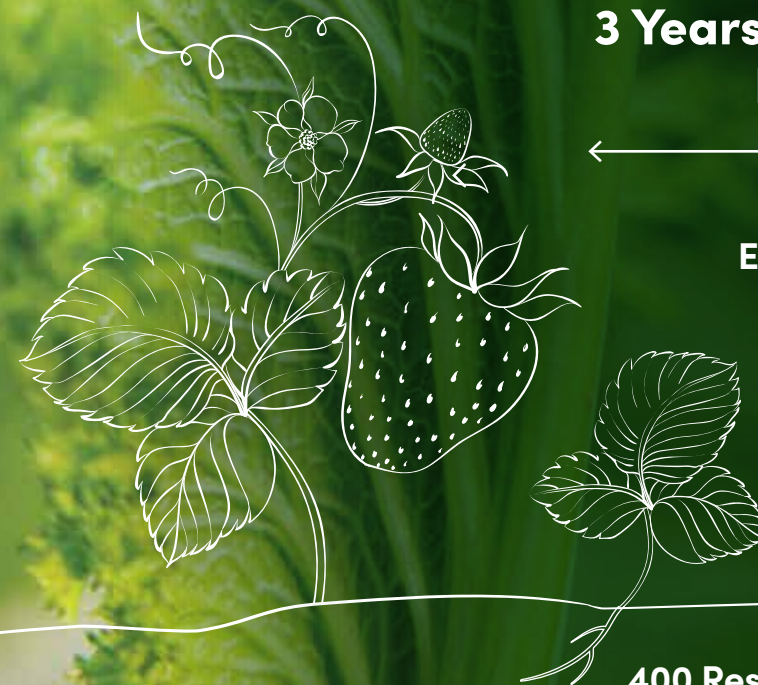
As part of Love Where You Live, PHS supported 12 community gardens in Nicetown and Tioga, offered 60 free gardening workshops, facilitated over \$100 thousand in garden infrastructure improvements, and planted more than 400 trees!

To better support the 200+ community gardens it champions across the region, PHS launched the Garden Stewardship Institute in the summer of 2025. Piloted the previous summer and refined during the year, the Institute offers workshops and consultation that address the complex organizational challenges faced by many community gardens.

With ongoing support from community partners, passionate gardeners, and friends like you and the Kersons, PHS will continue breaking new ground, using our expertise to help cultivate a cleaner, greener, healthier region we can all be proud of.



3 Years Later: Improved Quality of Life for Nicetown and Tioga



Education and Engagement Programs
Tree Tenders
Community Gardens
Workforce Development
LandCare

400 Residents of Nicetown and Tioga
Who Participated in the Planning Process to Create the Love
Where You Live Greening Plan

A Win-Win for a Proud City

The Parade on the Parkway

It had happened only once before in 2018: a long-desired parade to celebrate Philadelphia’s own Super Bowl Champions. After the Eagles’ Super Bowl LIX victory, the City of Philadelphia prepared to shine on the national stage with another unforgettable celebration up Broad Street and the Parkway.

It would be a moment of pride set against a backdrop that is brag worthy in and of itself, including Logan Square, LOVE Park, the Art Museum, and the Rodin Museum, with gardens and greenspaces carefully cultivated by PHS to provide year-round beauty even in the dead of February.

Philadelphia counts on PHS to keep many of its most iconic public spaces pristine and impressive, designed to be tough enough to withstand the challenges of foot traffic and weather. Always learning and growing, PHS knew that ensuring the gardens’ future spring splendor—a cause for celebration all its own—would require measures to protect the gardens from more than a million fans celebrating this historic moment.

In fall of 2024, PHS added nearly 30,000 additional spring bulbs in preparation for a seasonal bloom of over 110,000 flowers in Logan Circle, a relatively recent planting approach to the space that Philadelphia has embraced as a beloved new tradition. Compacting the soil of these latent beauties still sleeping in the earth might diminish the colorful spring spectacle.

Healthy Commercial Corridors + New PHS Ties

120,000+ Visitors Enchanted by the Creative Spaces and Activities

South Street & Manayunk Pop-Up Gardens

But thanks to a great working relationship between PHS and the City of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation implemented plans to keep parade-goers’ feet and curious hands out of the flowerbeds. The effort was a success, and the nodding daffodils and beckoning tulips beguiled residents and visitors with their dazzling display in April as planned.

“It’s hard to go far in the city without seeing some area or some garden that PHS has had a hand in.”

— Todd Greenberg

“The work that we do is largely on public property, and the City of Philadelphia is a strong partner” says Todd Greenberg, project manager for the Public Gardens and Landscape team, whose responsibility includes the Parkway gardens. “In turn, the city recognizes the value that PHS brings to its public spaces.”

Long after the parade’s biodegradable confetti has finished dissolving into the ground, PHS’s 90+ acres of public gardens and landscapes will continue to serve as big, bold, beautiful sources of inspiration, education, and pride for Philadelphia, thanks to generous donors and members like you.



10 Years Later, Teeming with Life

“Pop Up” Garden. The very name itself conveys a sense of the fleeting, a catch-it-while-you-can experience. And that was the most PHS’s innovative creators dared hope for ten years ago when PHS boldly ventured into uncharted territory, transforming a vacant lot on South Street into a garden oasis that invited visitors to relax with a drink or grab a bite to eat.

The South Street Pop Up Garden was more than well received; this magical greenspace helped spark the revitalization of a then-tired urban corridor that’s now alive with shops and restaurants. The garden’s patronage and programming have exploded over the years, with 1,200 visitors passing through the South Street Pop Up Garden’s

weekend-long 10th anniversary celebration in September 2024 and over 78,000 in the 2025 fiscal year.

With events like plant swaps and live music, horticulture classes, and a changing lineup of stunning and curious plants to behold, the South Street Pop Up Garden, along with its younger sibling in Manayunk, has launched many a casual visitor into the wider world of plants. Fans of the South Street Pop Up Garden will be pleased to learn that this source of pride in Philadelphia’s urban landscape will be back again in 2026, continuing to invite new initiates into PHS’s gardening community and fueling our year-round greening work, all while serving some of the best drinks in town.

PHS’S PUBLIC GARDENS & LANDSCAPES

PHS’s expertise is recognized across the region. With the addition of new spaces including the Philadelphia Zoo and Independence National Historical Park’s Bicentennial Bell Garden, Philadelphia and many of its iconic attractions will be ready to look their best as we welcome the world to our country’s birthplace for the 250th anniversary of American independence.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 26th Street Greenway* | Philadelphia Museum of Art Gardens and Grounds* |
| Azalea Garden* | Philadelphia Navy Yard |
| The Delaware River Waterfront Corporation’s Gardens and Grounds | The Philadelphia Zoo |
| Eastern State Penitentiary Terrace Garden* | PHS Headquarters * |
| Independence National Historical Park’s Bicentennial Bell Garden | PHS Meadowbrook Farm* |
| JFK Boulevard Greenway* | PHS Pop Up Garden at Manayunk* |
| Logan Square Gardens* | PHS Pop Up Garden at South Street* |
| LOVE Park Gardens | Rodin Museum Garden and Grounds* |
| Mann Center for the Performing Arts | Sports Complex Special Services District |
| PECO Green Roof | Subaru of America Headquarters |
| Pennsylvania Convention Center | |

NOTE: *Supported fully or in part by PHS donors and endowments.



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Consolidated Financial Statement

For the Years Ended June 30, 2025 and 2024
Audited Results

Revenue and Support	2025 Without Donor Restriction		2025 With Donor Restriction	2025 Total	2024 Total
Earned Revenue	\$13,865	34.7%	\$ –	\$13,865	\$11,857
Institutional Support	\$14,742	36.8%	\$4,230	\$18,972	\$15,665
Individual Giving (including membership)	\$2,825	7.1%	\$2,025	\$4,850	\$4,797
Net investment activity	\$1,491	3.7%	\$4,239	\$5,730	\$4,911
Net assets released	\$7,088	17.7%	\$(7,088)	\$ –	\$ –
TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT	\$40,011	100.0%	\$3,406	\$43,417	\$37,230

Expenses	2025 Without Donor Restriction		2025 With Donor Restriction	2025 Total	2024 Total
Flower S	\$11,908	30.8%	\$ –	\$11,908	\$10,843
how					
Healthy Neighborhoods	\$17,495	45.3%	\$ –	\$17,495	\$16,008
Public Gardens & Landscapes	\$4,615	12.0%	\$ –	\$4,615	\$4,419
Development, Marketing & Education	\$4,591	11.9%	\$ –	\$4,591	\$4,282

Change in net assets before change in pension benefit obligation	\$1,402	–	\$3,406	\$4,808	\$1,678
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A copy of the audited consolidated financial statements, to include the value of PHS's "Pension Benefit Obligation," can be provided upon request.

Contributors

PHS is grateful to the following individuals and organizations for their generous gifts and pledges received between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025. Many thanks to all supporters, friends, and volunteers who make the work of PHS possible.

\$1,000,000+

The William Penn Foundation

\$250,000–\$999,999

Anonymous

Bank of America

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Independence Blue Cross

John Otto Haas 1956 Trust

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Vanguard Charitable

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\$2,500–\$4,999

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American Online Giving Foundation, Inc.
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Select Event Group
Garth Shuler
Leslie C. Morris-Smith
Power Electric & Equipment Services
Primex
Helen S. Weary
The Xerces Society

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Legacy Society
* Deceased

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