An Enduring Sanctuary for Well-Being

In creating the landscapes and gardens that we now know as Bloedel Reserve, Prentice Bloedel worked not only with renowned landscape architects and designers, but also with leading creative thinkers. His advisors included Charles Lewis, often referred to as the “father of horticultural therapy,” Jay Appleton, a leading thinker on experiential landscapes, and Drs. Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, both university researchers and environmental psychologists. Their vision and advice helped shape the layout of paths and sequence of garden experiences. For this and many other reasons, Bloedel Reserve is not a typical botanical garden. The Reserve is a tract of land set aside for a specific purpose – to meaningfully connect people with nature.

The restorative power of nature is the very essence of the Reserve itself, and it is given structure by our wellness programs Strolls for Well-Being and Strolls at Home. These programs are offered free-of-charge, onsite and, for the first time last year, online.

This summary report shares the ways in which these public programs are being continued and nurtured against the odds of the current global pandemic. Special thanks to Strolls Facilitators Karen Gerstenberger and Karen Hust and advisor Dr. Carl Westphal, as well as to Bloedel staff members Andre ten Dam, Sina Irving, Anna Teiche, and Gretchen Douma, for their resilience and dedication in support and leadership of Bloedel Reserve’s well-being programs.

Sincerely yours,

Ed Moydell
The Richard A. Brown President & CEO

P.S. In case you missed it in the January edition of Seattle Times’ Pacific Northwest Magazine, here’s the link to a marvelous feature on Strolls by writer Lorene Edwards Forkner.
Wellness Is a Way of Life at Bloedel Reserve

Our visionary co-founder Virginia Bloedel would never have imagined the profound truth of her wisdom, “...being present in nature elevates and nurtures the human spirit, heals hearts and minds, and enriches our communities, and our world.”

Bloedel Reserve was founded on this principle in 1988. The ravages of COVID-19 have spotlighted the interconnectedness of nature and well-being today. Simply put, the Reserve is good for body, mind, and soul -- and our guests know it. In 2020, more than 45,000 local residents and regional guests found solace, reassurance, and hope by visiting Bloedel’s gardens, forests, and meadows.

Since its inception in 2014, our Strolls for Well-Being program has been built on the concept that immersion in nature is a profoundly nurturing and healing experience. Now in its 8th year, the program has served more than 2,150 people.

When the Reserve had to shut down for nearly three months last spring, that also meant that we couldn’t offer our Strolls orientations at the Japanese Guest House and adjunct workshops. And the Virginia Mason medical team that had been working with us to measure the impact of the Strolls program on participant health had to turn its full attention to the COVID crisis.

Determined to find a way to provide continued access to Strolls’ invaluable wellness teachings, we reimagined and reintroduced it in online form last April (Strolls at Home) and later in the year in an online/onsite hybrid format. Group meetings were hosted on Zoom and, when the Reserve reopened last May, participants were able to once again take their solo themed walks onsite. Our Grief Group offering with Island Volunteer Caregivers also resumed.

We were especially thrilled when Bainbridge Island School District asked for our permission in April to promote Strolls at Home as a new wellness option for parents, students, and teachers. (We said “Yes!”) We’re further heartened to learn about virtual participants from other areas who are practicing the program where they live, and some who are trying to find ways to share it in their work environments, including some participants who are trying to find ways to share our program in their work environments. We know of a university staffer in another state who is creating a program for students and a docent at another public garden is sharing forest bathing in her community, to name just two.
Looking Beyond the Impact of COVID

COVID’s economic toll on Bloedel Reserve meant budget cuts and a hiring freeze in 2020-21 — including the delay in hiring a priority position: a Program Manager for Nature & Well-Being initiatives. When resources become available, the new Program Manager will lead the way in growing the Reserve’s well-being services. This includes promoting our Strolls programming with other public gardens, parks, and outdoor spaces whose guests could benefit from our experience and our evidence-based findings illustrating the healing properties of immersion in nature.

In the meantime, more than 200 participants took part in the spring and summer sessions this year and the Strolls workbook has been updated. (The earlier edition was revised in order to update the maps and photos, redesign the cover, and make copy edits for better clarity and accuracy.) As we look towards the fall, Strolls for Well-Being will continue as a hybrid online/onsite offering, Strolls at Home will remain as a feature on our website, and both programs will remain free-of-charge to participants.

2020 BY THE NUMBERS

Here’s a snapshot of the special brand of mindfulness in nature that the Strolls for Well-Being and Strolls at Home programs provided during the past year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>247</th>
<th>Strolls for Well-Being hybrid participants (online/onsite)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>Strolls at Home visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$151,877</td>
<td>Cost of Well-Being Initiatives at Bloedel Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$48,000</td>
<td>Cost to deliver Strolls for Well-Being Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$18,000</td>
<td>Value of complimentary memberships given to Strolls for Well-Being participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$194</td>
<td>Per participant cost of complimentary Strolls For Well-Being program</td>
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With Gratitude to Our Supporters

It is with heartfelt appreciation that we recognize our Strolls for Well-Being program founders Ruth McCaffrey and Sally Schauman, nonprofit partners Virginia Mason and Island Volunteer Caregivers, and the generous supporters who allow us to continue offering this extraordinary program to its participants—and to do so free-of-charge.


The value of Bloedel Reserve’s well-being programs is best described by the participants themselves.

“Bloedel is my refuge... thank you for this Piece of heaven on earth.”

“Strolls For Well-Being has not only reconnected me with nature but it has reconnected me with myself.”

“I found the Strolls for Well-being at Bloedel Reserve to be a stimulating rebirth for me. The program not only brought me a fresh awareness of nature, but it also inspired the awareness of my inner-most feelings. It allowed me to face an emotional challenge which I suspect would or could have been debilitating. My gratitude goes out to Bloedel Reserve for sponsoring the program and facilitating its implementation.”

“There is a magical quality to Bloedel, unlike any other place I’ve visited. I am once transformed, energized, inspired, relaxed, and released from daily cares to be completely present with my own soul and the wonders of nature.”

Bloedel Reserve is a 501 (c)(3) public charity, federal tax identification # 91-6182786.