



Olbrich's Expansion Project

An Interview with Project Manager Randy Wiesner

What part of the process is coming up?

Beginning in February, MSR began the final drawing phase – Construction Documents (CDs). During this phase, all drawings, details, and specifications for contract bidding and construction are finalized. CDs will finish in late April or early May followed by a final review from staff. The bidding and contracting phase will start in late May and go through the end of August. Construction will begin in early September.

What are some of the unique aspects of this project?

I appreciate the architectural style MSR has brought to the Learning Center addition. They were able to continue with the existing Prairie School Style Architecture while giving it a modern look inside and out by using similar materials in different applications. In addition, city ordinance requires us to meet a minimum LEED green building rating of SILVER. If we are able to obtain all of the points we anticipate through the construction process, we will possibly be able to achieve a higher rating of GOLD.

I think it is great that the design team is setting up the building to be a sustainable leader by maximizing Solar Photovoltaic panels on the roof of the Learning Center. The electricity generated will be used immediately on site at Olbrich helping to reduce operating costs. Any extra electricity not used on site will go into MG&E's electrical grid.

We are also looking at the possibility of collecting and storing rainwater from the roofs for irrigating plants in the conservatory and greenhouse. Currently, city water is softened, then sent through a reverse osmosis process. Our goal is to be able to capture enough rainwater annually to supply the majority of the required plant water for the conservatory and greenhouses, and use reverse osmosis water only as a reserve source to reduce the amount of chlorides and clear waste water going out to the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District. This will also have an added benefit of reducing Olbrich operating costs.

What aspects of the project/building are you the most excited about?

My two favorite parts of most projects are the early design phases where the project starts to take shape on the drawing board, and the actual construction phase where you can see everything becoming reality.

Why is this project important to the City of Madison?

I don't think anywhere in the history of Olbrich Botanical Gardens, from Michael B. Olbrich's vision in 1916 through the completion of the existing campus in 1991, anyone would have thought Olbrich would become the attraction that it is today. Visitor attendance grows every year and it isn't just Madison residents visiting, people from other states and countries visit here annually.

What's your connection to Olbrich and the Conservatory?

A local architect, Stuart W. Gallaher, hired me after I completed my Associates Degree in Architectural Technology. Stuart had a small firm of three people, but he was a very popular architect in the Madison area, and southern Wisconsin in general. His designs include the Chalet Landhaus in New Glarus and numerous Madison park facilities. Stuart designed the first Olbrich building – The Visitor Center (Atrium) in 1970. In late 1987, the City Parks Division approached Stuart about expanding the Olbrich facility. We worked on plans and specifications through most of 1988, construction began in 1989, and was completed in 1991. During this time we also built a scale model of the proposed campus to be used for presentations and fundraising.

Once construction started the other office draftsman and I would drive across town on our Friday lunch hour to see the weekly progress. It was awesome to see so much happening all at once and it's even more awesome to see what Olbrich has become in the years since then. Being able to be a part of another expansion project to this facility is an honor.