



Strolling through a garden, basking in the warming sun, and sniffing the beautiful surrounding blooms is the epitome of a glorious spring day. But for some people, that perfect day isn't necessarily an option. Heritage Museums & Gardens in Sandwich is known for their 100 acres of sprawling gardens and trails, but working with the undulating landscape of Cape Cod means that some of the trails and gardens can be a challenge for even the most athletic visitors. So in 2017, Heritage, in partnership with Dirtworks Landscape Architecture and the Horsley Witten Group, set out to create a space for anyone and everyone to enjoy. July 2019 saw the opening of the McGraw Family Garden of the Senses, the first wellness garden introduced on Cape Cod.

"We want to invite people of all ages, abilities and mobility levels to connect with nature, and to allow everyone to engage in the garden experience," says Anne Scott-Putney, President & CEO of Heritage, "Our goal is to create a welcoming space for everyone. The McGraw Family Garden of the Senses offers a rich sensory experience with accessible and easy terrain." The garden was designed to provide universal access to visitors of all physical



and mental capabilities. Easy, wheelchair accessible boardwalks wind through the two acres of gardens, bypassing the difficult terrain and offering visitors access to 25,000 new plants. The plants are there to be smelled, touched, and fully experienced, while water features and stunning vistas add to an already relaxing, soothing experience. Some of the land used in the garden was not previously open to the public due to the surrounding landscape. But now, it is open to every visitor thanks to the Hart Maze, which acts as a thread, connecting separate features and discreetly accommodating a wide range of abilities.

"Universal Design expands opportunity and enhances the



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WELCOME *One + All*

2020 welcomes the second year of the Universally Designed McGraw Family Garden of the Senses at Heritage Museums & Gardens

BY ELIZABETH SHAW • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN CUTRONA

experience for people of all ages, abilities and cultures. Design is a powerful and influential tool in improving our daily lives, helping to enhance experience, build confidence, provide comfort and offer control. Variations in individual ability are simply a part of life; at some point we will all have to address such variations. Universal Design accommodates that,” says David Kamp, FASLA, LF, NA, Founder of Dirtworks Landscape Architecture, “This garden is a natural expression of Universal Design. It seeks to provide opportunity and choice for each visitor to engage with nature on their own terms, in their own way and at their own pace. This is achieved within a series of unique settings, each with distinct character, different interests and

degrees of activity. Designed to offer varying levels of sensory engagement, the configuration, materials and details focus on tactile, auditory, visual, olfactory and gustatory experiences. Beyond the five senses, the garden seeks to engage and improve upon range of motion, vestibular, motor planning, proprioception and cognition skills. The garden also reflects considerations of safety and security, strength and stamina, awareness and orientation, privacy and respite, sequences and transitions, interest and activity, and flexibility for changing needs.”

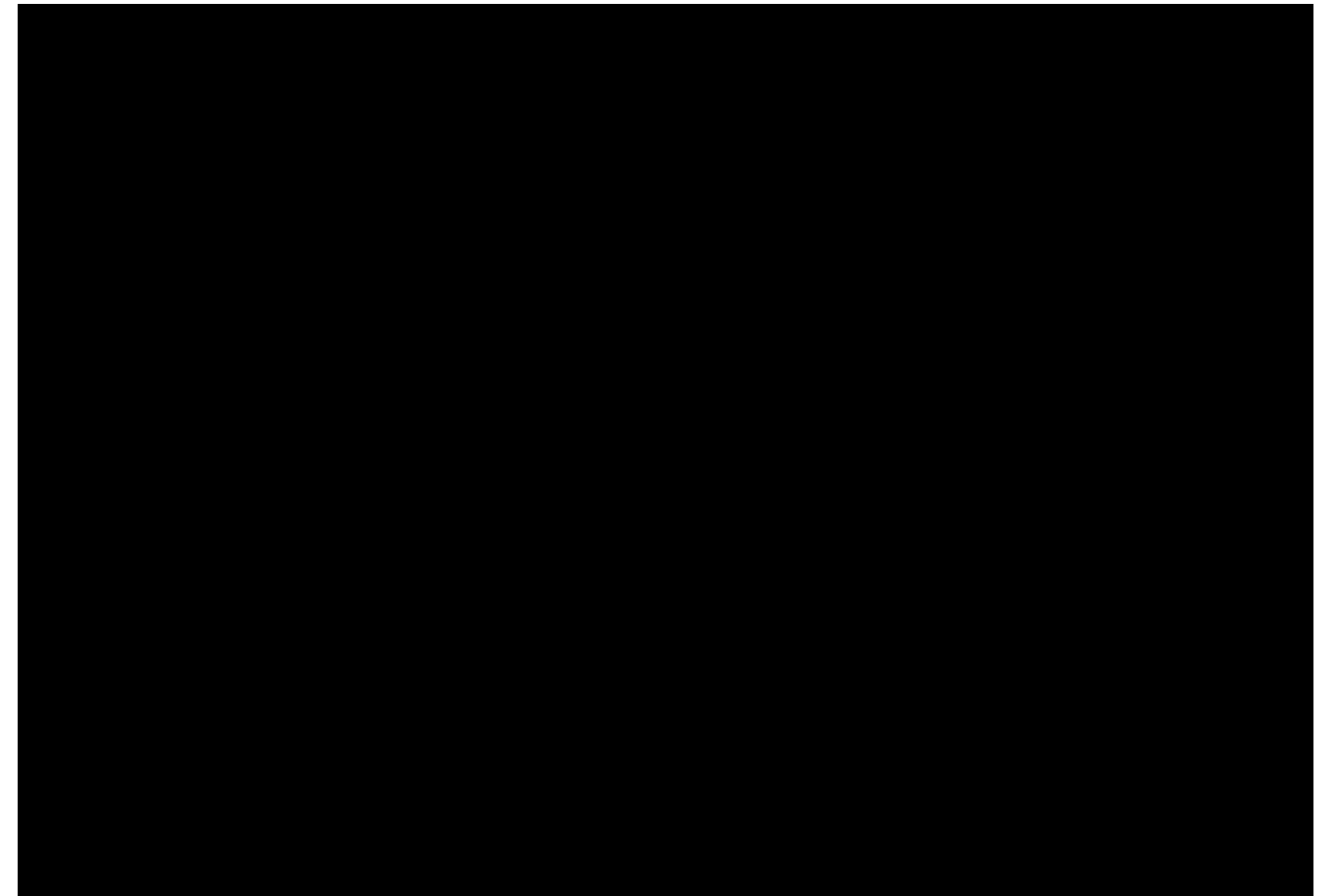
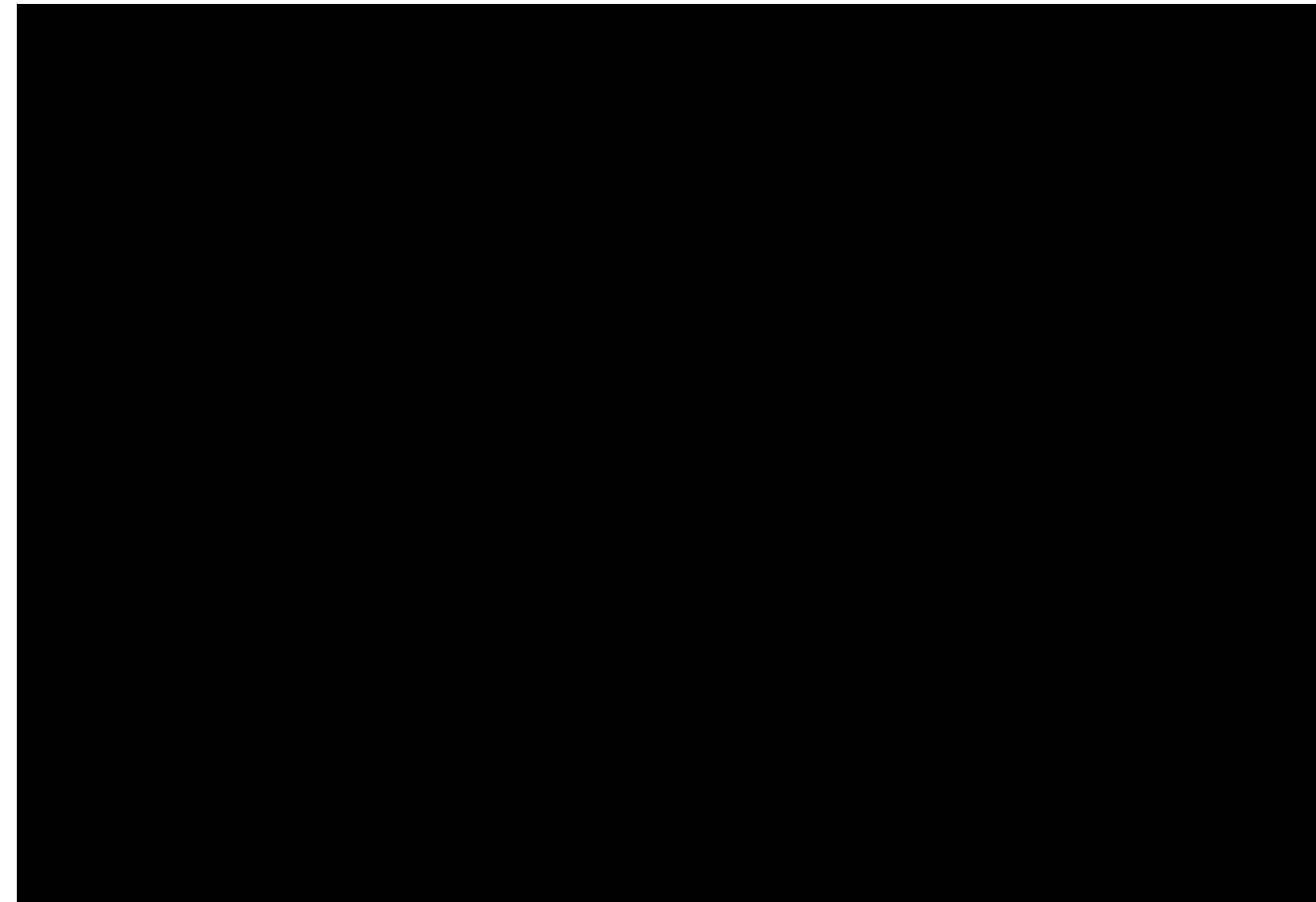
Gardens across the two acres of land are designed to engage and cater to everyone who wishes to visit. Elevated water features and lower gardens are perfect for



OUR GOAL FOR THE GARDEN WAS TO EXPAND UPON HERITAGE’S MISSION TO INSPIRE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES TO EXPLORE AND LEARN ABOUT NATURE. WE WANTED TO OFFER EVERYONE – REGARDLESS OF ABILITY – THE CHANCE TO IMMERSE THEMSELVES INTO NATURE. TO DO SO WE NEEDED TO CREATE A SETTING RICH IN SENSORY EXPERIENCE AND WELCOMING TO ALL. COMFORT, ACCESSIBILITY, BEAUTY AND INSPIRATION WERE CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN THE DESIGN.



those in wheelchairs, quiet areas with relaxing scents and sounds are perfect for those who are easily stimulated, and sections of the garden focus mainly on the other senses, engaging texture and smell, which not only makes the garden accessible to those with sensory issue, but the scents can help evoke memories. “Plants in that area have an interesting or distinct scent or texture, like rosemary and basil,” describes Les Lutz, Director of Horticulture and Facilities management at Heritage,





“As you walk down the boardwalk, you encounter an area that’s much more colorful; it’s really meant to just be a riot of color.” The smallest details add to the overall experience, with flowers planted to create a soothing, satisfying rainbow colored oasis. “We chose a lot of plants that will trail over walls,” explains Lutz, “the garden

has about 250’ of linear walls and we want to soften some of them with the trailing plants, like sweet potato vines.” Lutz and his team added 11 new species of trees, 15 new species of shrubs, 62 new species of perennials and 25 new annual species, resulting in over 20,000 new plants for visitors to experience throughout the garden.

Heritage worked closely with various national and local organizations, including Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, JML Care Center, Sight Loss Services of Cape Cod, National Braille Press, and many more, to ensure that every aspect of the garden was as inclusive and accessible as possible. In turn,

these organizations are welcome to use the garden with their clients, ensuring that the collaborative planning process is leveraged to its maximum potential.

The McGraw Family Garden of the Senses is a true testament to what can happen when groups come together to create a welcoming,

more accessible world. Bringing together Heritage, Dirtworks and Horsley Witten resulted in a space that will surely stand the test of time, and inspire others to bring more of that magic to the area. “One aspect that made this project unique is the level of collaboration. In order to create a universally accessible garden that preserves the qualities of this beautiful setting, we needed to find a sensitive balance between the needs of the users and the demands of the site. We had to address a challenging terrain, historic structures and mature plantings while also accommodating the varied physical and psychological needs of visitors. This was achieved with a sustained collaboration with Heritage’s horticultural and program staff, a terrific engineering team, and

community partners representing the region’s health organizations. This collaboration began with the garden’s programming and lasted through design and construction,” says Kamp of the experience.

“The Collaboration also included the great generosity of Dave and Missy McGraw and a number of individuals who shared our vision to create a stunningly beautiful and accessible space for all people to engage with nature at their own pace and in their own time,” added Scott-Putney, “we simply could not have achieved this vision without their support.

Elizabeth Shaw is a staff writer for Cape Cod Life Publications.

