

Hundreds turn out for public opening of gardens on Museum Hill

By Adele Oliveira

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The Santa Fe Botanical Garden at Museum Hill opened to the public Sunday, after a gala Friday evening and a members-only opening Saturday. More than 2,000 garden-goers strolled among *Juniperus scopulorum* (Rocky Mountain juniper), *Melampodium leucanthum* (blackfoot daisy) and *Cylindropuntia whipplei* (snow leopard cholla) as many of the 2,000 monarch butterflies released Saturday lingered on fragrant lavender and rose shrubs.

The Museum Hill Garden joins two other outdoor sites managed by the Santa Fe Botanical Garden: the Ortiz Mountains Educational Preserve and the Lenora Curtin Wetland Preserve near La Cienega. The Santa Fe Botanical Garden was founded in 1987, and in December 2006, the group acquired 11 acres of land on Museum Hill in a long-term lease from the city for a new garden. The garden was designed by landscape architect W. Gary Smith (read an article about the design in last week's *Pasatiempo*) and the plan was approved in 2011.

Phase one of the garden (phase two and three are yet to be developed) features a meadow area, an orchard, a dry garden, an art trail, a drainage and water-catchment system called La Rambla, and Kearny's Gap Bridge. The 62-foot long bridge, made of steel and painted bright red, spans an arroyo that cuts through the garden. It was built in 1913 and originally stood along N.M. 283, southwest of Las Vegas, N.M.

Garden admission was free Sunday, and several family-oriented activities were available to visitors, including worm composting and coffee-filter-butterfly making. At one table run by the nonprofit Cornerstones Community Partnerships, children made adobe bricks in small wooden molds and seed balls from a mixture of potting soil, dirt, clay, processed straw, water and seeds.

"I want to make one. I want to do the seed," said 3-year-old Leo Nordstrum as he squished the mud between his hands. "I like mud," he added after flattening his seed ball into a pancake.

"We're locals, and I wanted to see what this was all about," said Leo's mother, Lisa Nordstrum. "I teach New Mexico history at [Santa Fe] Prep, so I'll be back with my class."

Education is an important component of the garden. Docents (including Santa Fe Botanical Garden board members, master gardeners from New Mexico State University's county extension services program and volunteers) were stationed throughout the gardens to guide visitors and answer questions Sunday. In addition, all plant species in the gardens are labeled with their common and scientific names, and there are informational placards about everything from climate change to the site's water-catchment system.

Board member Cathy Gronquist explained one feature of La Rambla stone drainage to Carolina

Echevarria and her two daughters, who were visiting from Mexico City. “This is Zuni bowl,” Gronquist said, pointing to a muddy, stone-lined depression at the end of a stone channel that tumbled down the hillside. “It slows the water down.”

“It absorbs it?” asked one of the girls.

“Yes. On Friday, this was running and, holy moly, there was a lot of water,” Gronquist said. “It’s modern-day erosion control.”

At the far end of Kearny’s Gap Bridge, master gardeners were on hand to answer gardening questions. Popular questions Sunday centered around what kinds of plants are easy to grow in New Mexico, are native or don’t require lots of water.

“This is such a teachable space,” said master gardener Robert Zimmerman. “One of its main themes is how to collect rainwater. ... There are a lot of fancy gardens around town, but they aren’t always practical and can use a lot of water. They’re pretty, but this is a real Santa Fe garden.”

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