

The National Medal for Museum and Library services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exciting ways. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden director Frank Robinson and community member Chris Corsello and his aide, Lisa Watts traveled to Washington to receive the national medal and spoke to IMLS about how the museum impacts the community.

Frank Robinson: The Botanical Garden was founded in 1984, open to the public the first time in 1987. Its role is really very broad in the community and in the last few years we have been very intentional about reaching out to serve the community in various ways including the public school systems.

Lisa Watts: I have a love of gardening and as part of our vocational program at our high school, we were sort of looking for opportunities that Chris might be able to be productive and one of those that was back in my mind was Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.

Frank Robinson: Volunteers are critical to us. We have about 600 all total, they contribute 32,000 hours of labor a year. Chris works in the garden section and the way he was introduced was through our plant sale, which the volunteers run completely twice a year. They even produce the plants as well as setup the sale and sell the plants to raise money for the garden.

Lisa Watts: We worked the plant sales and Christopher is very good at transporting plants for everybody that is buying the plants. He is quite strong so he is very helpful in moving things; we water plants we weed in the garden. This is a typical expression you would see when he gets out of my car and comes to the garden. Just talking about it gets him excited; it's almost a magical kind of thing for him. It's just such an experience to have these people embrace Chris. And everywhere we go in the garden people recognize him and talk to him and he is just one of the gang.

Frank Robinson: The reason we wanted to tell his story was that he has a real purpose at the garden, he has a real job that he gets to do time and again. And it has just obviously built his self confidence in ways that we could not have imagined and at first the volunteers particularly with the plant sale were a little hesitant to interact with him, didn't quite know how to interact and treat him, but now he has just become one of the gang. And he is very strong and so when we need some muscle he is there and he is wonderful in accommodating people by helping them to load their cars and things. And so this is one of those intangible things that botanical gardens may not define themselves by but its that kind of experience which ends up being so meaningful to people.

Lisa Watts: To be able to fit in in that capacity is wonderful for him and certainly I mean he is really like an ambassador for other kids that have disabilities that want to come and work in an environment such as the wonderful environment we have at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.