

2011 Medal Winner Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden

Speakers: Host, Frank Robinson & Lisa Watts

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>> HOST: The National Medal for Museum and Library Service 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 aid 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. It opened to the public the first time in 1987. Its role is really very broad in the community and in the last few years we've 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. One of those that were in the back of my mind was Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.

>> FRANK ROBINSON: Volunteers are critical to us. We have about 600 all totaled. 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 set up the sale and sell the plants to raise money for the garden.

>> LISA WATTS: We work the plant sales. Christopher is very good at transporting plants for everybody that is buying the plants. He is quite strong so he's 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's 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. It has just obviously built his self-confidence in ways that we could not have imagined.

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's just become one of the gang. He is very strong and so when we need some muscle he's there and he's wonderful in accommodating people by helping them to load their cars and things.

This is one of those intangible things the Botanical Gardens may not define themselves by but it's 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's 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.