

2012 Medal Winner Garfield Park Conservatory

Speakers: Narrator, Eunita Rushing, Tiara Livingston

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>> NARRATOR: The National Medal for Museum and Library Services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exceptional ways. Garfield Park Conservatory Director Eunita Rushing and community member Tiara Livingston traveled to Washington from Chicago, Illinois to receive the National Medal and spoke to IMLS about how the museum impacts the community.

>> EUNITA RUSHING: The Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance is a nonprofit organization that empowers people and changes their lives through the power of nature. And the Alliance raises funds to develop and implement innovative programs there that educate people about the importance of plants in our lives every day. So we provide educational programs as well as special events geared toward school age children, families, and adults.

>> TIARA LIVINGSTON: Well the Green Teens Program consists of 14- to 19-year-olds and it can be over a period of time. You can participate in it from freshman year to senior year, which is what I did. While working at the Conservatory, you end up meeting most of the staff that work at the Conservatory. So they would come in sometimes and just give us an overview of what they did and how they got to where they were at and then just like a boost for us to stand up, I guess, and want to learn more about the Conservatory and its collection of plants and all those things. I did it because I just wanted something to do after school, because living in the community that I lived in, there wasn't really too much for me to do.

>> EUNITA RUSHING: One of the aspects that the community said that they really would like to have addressed was more opportunities for youth. And we felt that this was a real opportunity for us to engage them on various levels. If you think about maintaining and running a Conservatory, there's so many jobs and career paths that we could expose them to. We have over 200,000 visitors annually. And so if they're on the floor

giving tours, acting as docents, if they're in the greenhouse helping to propagate plants, if they're creating objects to be sold in our gift shop, they're getting a myriad of exposure and hands-on skills development that is really important to a young person's development.

>> TIARA LIVINGSTON: I am attending DePaul University in Lincoln Park. I am majoring in sociology. And I am also currently working at the Conservatory with the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance as an administrative assistant as well as a gift shop associate.

>> EUNITA RUSHING: It is important for teens to have opportunities in the communities where they live because teens don't traditionally travel outside of their communities very far. And the Conservatory has been an institution in the Garfield Park community for over 100 years. It is the right thing to do for us to reach out and engage teens in the programs and the initiatives that we have at the Conservatory because these teens will become adults, and if they support and believe in what we do there, when they become adults, they'll hopefully continue to support the work of the Conservatory and can come back and talk about what it meant to them in their lives. We are mentoring them, helping them to make the right decisions for their lives and their future. The teens will become like Tiara thinking far beyond high school, thinking about who it is they want to be as adults, when they grow up, what they want to be, and how they want to make a contribution to society.