

The Myriad Gardens - Looking Back

Written by Steve Lackmeyer
Saturday, 15 October 2011 22:59 -

With thousands attending the grand "re-opening" of the Myriad Gardens, let's go back to a great 2004 discussion of the gardens' history between then Mayor Kirk Humphreys and longtime Myriad Gardens advocate (and chairman emeritus of the gardens foundation) Jim Tolbert.

The follow videos best represent the gardens that we remember through 2009:

It is interesting to note that the Myriad Gardens was the vision of the legendary Dean A. McGee, and by all accounts it wouldn't have been built without the constant push by the late oilman And it was Larry Nichols, executive chairman of Devon Energy, who set a new vision for the gardens starting with a decision to build a new 50-story, \$750 million headquarters across the street. The tower project led to the creation of a new tax increment finance district, which would, combined with \$8 million approved by voters for an overhaul of the Crystal Bridge, allow for a \$41 million makeover of the gardens.

The following video provides a great glimpse of the makeover as it was in progress:

In a June, 2011 story in The Oklahoman, writer David Zizzo provided an excellent run-down of the changes:

- The central feature of the gardens — the lake — is now completely accessible, even to the

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handicapped, thanks to an elevator and numerous ramps. The jewel of the gardens, the Crystal Bridge, a unique cylindrical tropical conservatory, glows. Its thousands of acrylic panels were replaced, its steel framework repainted and a stage-quality, computerized LED lighting system allows for colorful light shows at night.

- Heading east from the northwest corner of the gardens, where the Oklahoma City Festival of the Arts for years has drawn thousands for its annual spring run, visitors pass seating areas inspired by Bryant Square in New York City. Plentiful rock seating areas also were added along a wide brick path. To the left, toward the new Devon tower across the street, stands what looks more like sculpture than structure. It's a band-shell at the head of a Great Lawn, ideal for picnics or seating on the grass for 2,500 people for performances onstage.

- Walking east, one can see one of nine new water features — a wave pool fountain. Modeled after an attraction designers had spotted in another country, the pool features water swelling over a brim and flowing down stairstep levels into a trough. The northeast corner of the botanical gardens is anchored by an imposing cascading fountain built to look like an outcropping in the Ozarks of northeastern Oklahoma.

- Heading south, one sees the seasonal plaza, site of a reflecting pool with sculptural fountain jets, with seating and large potted trees that will be moved in winter to make room for an ice-skating rink in winter. At the south end of the plaza will be a restaurant, enclosed in glass for views of the city, the pool, the Crystal Bridge and a large fall. Water cascading there will have begun its journey at the Ozark waterfall, meandering through Meinder's Garden before returning to the lake.

- At the southeast corner is Arena Plaza, the gardens' gateway facing the Oklahoma City Arena. The south end of the Crystal Bridge also underwent serious remodeling, including a 30-foot-wide pedestrian promenade leading into a grand entry area and lushly planted "living forecourt" that can be rented for events.

- The water stage remains, as does the bridge over the lake, from which one can look west to see another feature that was inspired by water attractions designers had seen in other countries — a new stairstep waterfall that empties into the lake.

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- Stretching across the southwest corner is the only totally fenced area, the Children's Garden. The spacious zone features plenty of cushioned play areas bristling with free-form play equipment, from spinning and swaying playground devices to a "treehouse" observation deck and small rock-climbing apparatus to a hedge maze featuring a grid that creates musical chimes when you step on tiles.

- Other sections of Children's Garden feature a shallow water area for aquatic life, a spot where kids can learn about plants and plant their own, and a Stonehenge-like "counsel ring" surrounded by bamboo plants that will offer a quieter place for classes and groups to relax.

- Adjacent to the Children's Garden is one of the most imaginative and sophisticated water features, a simulated thunderstorm. Visitors can walk under the device, sculpture, or whatever it is, and experience everything from a growing thunderstorm, complete with simulated lightning and thunder.

The "storm" is followed by fountain sprays that rise from the plaza that's adorned with bits of color-infused glass tile, representing growth of flowers. Wear your swimming suit.

- A shady knoll by the Crystal Bridge is where one can find a "dog relief area," an enclosure that will be like a mini-dog park, where pets can be let off leashes. A fountain in the Meinder's Garden is provided to help dogs cool off.