Media Contact:
Lynn H. Bates, APR, CPRC
VP for External Relations at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens
lbates@selby.org  (941) 366-5731 ext. 225

Marie Selby Botanical Gardens Adopts Historic Spanish Point: Q&A
April 17, 2020

Questions about Marie Selby Botanical Gardens adopting Historic Spanish Point, with answers from Jennifer Rominiecki, President and CEO of Selby Gardens:

**Why does this make sense from Selby Gardens’ perspective?**
Because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to preserve yet another magnificent historic resource. Also, this merger will allow Selby Gardens to expand its footprint to include a specialty in native plants and to provide programming at two sites. In addition, Selby Gardens’ 14,000 member households and Historic Spanish Point’s 750 member households will immediately have access to both locations. This will significantly benefit both membership groups and provide HSP with an opportunity to attract new visitors, donors, and volunteers.

**Won’t this be a financial burden for Selby Gardens?**
Ultimately, we are confident that this merger will benefit both locations. Certainly, in these difficult times, having both sites temporarily closed to the public makes this merger more challenging in the short term. That said, Selby Gardens is in a solid financial position, and is built to take this on.

Last year, for the first time in its history, Selby Gardens eliminated its debt as a result of the fiscal health and diversified revenue streams created from transformational audience development, engagement, and programming.

**What is the cost to Selby Gardens for the merger?**
Selby Gardens will be assuming HSP’s annual operating budget, which last year was just under $900,000, as well as paying down HSP’s line of credit. HSP Executive Director John McCarthy will remain on as the Vice President for Selby Gardens’ Historic Spanish Point campus, and the Gardens plans to retain all of Historic Spanish Point’s 16 full- and part-time employees.

**Will this impact your Master Plan at Selby Gardens’ Downtown location? Why not build some of your planned buildings at HSP?**
This acquisition will complement, but not dispense with the need for, the Master Plan at Selby Gardens’ Downtown location. While some programs can be offered on both campuses, the reality is that the two sites are 10 miles apart, offer distinctive features and resources, and draw visitors from slightly different areas. This is an opportunity to save 30 acres of green space in Sarasota County and, in time, grow HSP’s research and educational opportunities around Florida’s native habitat, just as we have done with epiphytes (air plants) at the Selby Gardens Downtown location. The two campuses will work very well together.
So is this a backup location in case the Master Plan doesn’t pass?
Because of the reduction of the scale of the Master Plan, we are optimistic that it will receive approval, and the result will be a revitalized Downtown campus, with the added bonus of a companion campus at Historic Spanish Point. Selby Gardens has already secured $35 million, restricted solely to the implementation of the Master Plan. The construction jobs and economic impact created by this project will give the local economy the jump start it needs once the pandemic is behind us.

What are the biggest challenges you face in turning Historic Spanish Point into a location that brings in enough revenue to cover its operating expenses?
We believe that growing awareness of Historic Spanish Point’s unique location, tied to rich programming, will lead to increased visitorship and engagement from the community.

What makes you most excited about the merger?
What we’re most excited about is the opportunity to tell the story of native Florida plants and of some of southwest Florida’s earliest inhabitants, and we’re excited that HSP will remain a place where locals and people from around the world can visit to learn about our history.

Isn’t this a risky move right now when many companies are shuttering their doors as a result of this coronavirus pandemic?
We are confident we are in a position to successfully merge and sustain the two organizations, thanks to the fact that Selby Gardens has no debt, and that we have a strong foundation of community and donor support. We are focused on a long-term approach and strategy to sustain the organization into the future.

Do non-profits and cultural organizations typically merge? Where else has this happened?
While the for-profit sector has historically viewed mergers and acquisitions as part of a successful growth strategy, non-profit mergers are not extremely common. But when missions and visions are aligned, mergers can really be a great growth strategy for non-profits, too – just as we saw with the Women’s Resource Center here in the Gulf Coast.

Do you expect to raise visitor and member prices at Historic Spanish Point?
Not at this time. We may reexamine that in the future.

Do you have plans to have a Master Plan of its own at HSP?
Not at this time. However, we anticipate that some improvements, such as alterations to the entrance area to make the flow of visitors smoother, will be necessary.

Do you plan to make any changes to HSP?
Any changes that are necessary in the future would be in keeping with HSP’s character and serene natural setting. Some ideas that will be implemented as soon as possible include:

- Creating joint summer camps and children’s education programs
- Creating joint adult education programs
- Expanding the HSP butterfly garden to include an interactive butterfly house
- Creating connectivity between both campuses by boat
Will you have catering and food options at HSP?
HSP currently allows on-site catering for events and weddings, but does not offer onsite food for visitors. We are considering on-site food options, but do not have any specifics on what that might look like at this point.

Will you increase the events and programming at Historic Spanish Point?
HSP currently hosts numerous public and private events on-site annually. We plan to align the events and programs with Selby Gardens’ current activities.

Will Selby Gardens maintain all volunteers at Historic Spanish Point?
Yes, Selby Gardens plans to keep all volunteers at Historic Spanish Point. Their work is vital to the daily, on-going operations at Historic Spanish Point.

Will there be changes to Selby Gardens’ structure and Board of Directors?
The Gulf Coast Heritage Association, which has run HSP, has been adopted as a supporting organization to Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. This move required changes to GCHA’s articles of incorporation, bylaws, and a notice to the IRS. We are pleased to say the changes were adopted unanimously by both boards and we are pleased to welcome Pat Ball and Mike Quillen from the GCHA to the Selby Gardens board of directors.