

WINTER 2023



# INSIDE THE DOMES

Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory

1,275: ATTENDEES AT DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS  
DON'T MISS OUR ELEGANT AUCTION Feb 10, 2024



SHOP LOCAL THIS HOLIDAY  
SEASON: PAGE 4



BEAN TO BAR WITH DAN  
BIESER FROM TABAL: PAGE 6

IT'S  
(ALWAYS)  
CHOCOLATE  
SEASON!



THANK YOU CONSERVATORY  
CIRCLE MEMBERS: PAGE 9



MEET PARKS EXHIBIT DESIGNER  
MEL LANCY: PAGE 10



# NEWS FROM THE DOMES



**S**o much fun ahead with a lineup of wonderful activities and programs!

## Membership

- ◇ The member lane is now open on weekends during peak hours. Watch for the sign and skip the line.
- ◇ Save the Date: Train Show Member Preview Night: Jan 19, 2024. Watch your email for registration information.

## Education

- ◇ The Education Program has launched a new series of wellness classes. Watch your email or visit [www.MilwaukeeDomes.org](http://www.MilwaukeeDomes.org).

## Plants and Facility

- ◇ The popular train show with

a theme of “Toyblox: Tiny Toy Towns” will open on Jan 20, 2024.

## Events

- ◇ Friends of the Domes will be hosting its first in-person auction. The event will be Feb 10, 2024, at The Domes. Learn more on page 5.

## Other

- ◇ Thanks to you, Friends of the Domes accomplished so much this past year:
  1. 200,010 visitors connected with nature during a trip to the Mitchell Park Domes (92% increase from prior year).
  2. 30,100 family members visited The Domes’ Education Center, staffed

by our wonderful volunteers, interns and work study students (153% increase from the prior year).

3. 4,490 children and youth learned about the importance of plants and nature through the engaging School Field Trip Program (104% increase from prior year).
- ◇ The Year-End Campaign has launched. This fundraising program raises more than \$20,000 to support programming at the Mitchell Park Domes. Today, more than ever, we need our members to join us as we push forward a new vision. See page 3. Please make a gift at [www.MilwaukeeDomes.org](http://www.MilwaukeeDomes.org). ■

# A Vision For the Future of the Mitchell Park Domes

**By Christa Beall Diefenbach,**  
**Executive Director, Friends of**  
**the Domes**

The Mitchell Park Domes was never just a building. It was an expression of an idea: *hope lives*. Consider the context in which the domes were constructed ... middle of the century in the post-war era. Like the rest of the world, Milwaukee was overcoming the ravages of war.

Built in what was, at the time, an industrial valley, these glorious glass bubbles rose from a field of smokestacks. Because of their unique and daringly beautiful shape, they were described as a “willful act of hope.”

## A Big Problem

We are all familiar with the many challenges facing The Domes. The chipping concrete; the failing glass and aluminum; an original-to-the-build HVAC system; the lack of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; the large carbon footprint.

All that, and we haven't discussed sustainability. The Domes has been operating at a deficit for decades—requiring the County to cover shortfalls.

There have been 25 years of studies and plans with no consensus and no path forward. It is safe to say that The Domes has what only can be described as a Big Hairy Audacious Problem.

With that said, this isn't a doomsday article. On the contrary, we are here to talk about

a potential bright future for our beloved conservatory.

## A Bright Idea

As you may know, Friends of the Domes is a private nonprofit that conducts about half of the operations at The Domes: membership, retail sales, education programming, marketing, and much more.

What you may have noticed of late is that we are an organization on the move. We more than doubled our membership, school field trip participants, fundraising revenue, and Domes admissions over the past two years. We accomplished this through strategic investments in infrastructure and staff resources. Today, we have 22 staff, hundreds of volunteers, and nearly 5,000 members.

Based on this success (that you helped make happen!), the Friends of the Domes Board of Directors adopted a new strategy for the Mitchell Park Domes.

This vision:

- Addresses the building's physical challenges.
- Revitalizes Mitchell Park.
- Enables The Domes to generate sufficient operating income.

The plan includes restoring the domes (new glazing and aluminum), a new café, increased educational facilities, an expanded gift shop, enhanced events space—and, importantly, long overdue steps to reinvigorate

Mitchell Park itself. In addition, the energy inefficiencies will be managed through a series of strategic investments.

This exciting vision also comes with a funding solution ... necessary funds would come from private philanthropy, municipal and other public funding sources, and, *hopefully*, an investment from Milwaukee County. Friends of the Domes would take the lead on both the private philanthropic campaign and securing the municipal and other public funding.

A key element of the plan is that it would result in an enhanced partnership between Friends of the Domes and Milwaukee County Parks (similar to other cultural institutions such as the Milwaukee County Zoo). This is a critical step in ensuring a sustainable business model that generates more revenue than expenses.

Although we still have a lot of work ahead of us, the initial response to this plan has been tremendously positive. The needed funds are available if all the stakeholders that hold the key pieces of the puzzle agree to join forces.

We will keep you informed as we take more steps toward achieving this vision. Thank you for everything you have done (and will do) to ensure a path forward! ■



# GIFTS UNDER GLASS

## Loving Our South Side Neighbors for 100+ Years

The Mitchell Park Domes is located in the beautiful, 62-acre Mitchell Park. Many do not realize that Mitchell Park is one of the original six Milwaukee County Parks created as part of the Milwaukee Parks Commission in 1890. Called the lungs of the city, the parks were meant to be a place where the community could enjoy access to green space and *breathe*. The conservatory and surrounding park are cherished and valued by our local community.

Friends of the Domes is able to return some of that love by featuring South Side residents as vendors at our events and in the Gifts Under Glass Gift Shop. You will find beautiful jewelry, screen printed t-shirts that are works of art, pottery, and so much more. When you purchase these items, you support The Domes and our *barrio* (neighborhood in Spanish)!

Members always receive 10% off of gift shop purchases. What a

great way to change a transactional holiday gift into something that is transformational (for both The Domes and our neighbors)!

Looking for more holiday gift ideas? Order an engraved paver and remind your loved ones that you care every time they visit The Domes! We also offer gift memberships and gift certificates for the gift shop. ■



*Your holiday shopping dollars do triple duty: bringing unique and amazing gifts to your friends and family while supporting the Friends of the Domes and local artists!*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## An Elegant Auction to Benefit the Mitchell Park Domes

Join us on Feb 10, 2024, from 5:30 to 10:00PM for an enchanting evening of fine cuisine, entertainment and auctions at the beautiful Mitchell Park Domes. Your registration includes Domes-themed food stations, cocktails, entertainment, an exquisite seated dessert and auction in the starlit greenhouse. Reserve your spot before Jan 15, 2024, by visiting [www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/auction](http://www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/auction) or using the QR code. ■



## Celebrate the Season at The Domes

Date(s)	Event
Dec 13-31	<b>The Domes open every day, including Tuesdays!</b>
Now through Jan 7	<b>A Holiday Snow Globe Floral Show in the Show Dome</b>
Tues 12/19 Tues 12/26	<b>Late Night at The Domes</b> The Domes will be open until 8PM (last admission at 7PM). The Show Dome will dazzle with after-dark music and light shows at 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, and 7:30. These mini-concerts blend dynamic music and LED lighting for a truly magical experience.
Sun 12/10, 1:00-3:00PM Sat 12/16, 10:00AM-12:00PM	<b>Story Teller Santa</b> Visit Santa and listen to his captivating tales. Great photo opportunity for children and grandchildren!
Sat 12/16, 2:00-3:00PM	<b>David HB Drake “Let There Be Light!”</b> The Gentle Troubadour returns to The Domes for his 41st performance, bringing us an eclectic mix of traditional carols and popular tunes.
Tues 12/19, 6:00-7:30PM	<b>Drums in The Domes!</b> Ko-Thi Dance Company, Milwaukee’s oldest African American arts organization, presents an energetic percussion concert.

## Train Show: ToyBlox Tiny Towns, Jan 20-March 17, 2024

Imagine, a huge children’s toy box, filled with toys and blocks of all kinds—Lego, Duplo, Lincoln Logs, and others—has been poured out alongside model railroad tracks in the Show Dome. Train stations and towns, beautiful plants and, of course, the exciting model trains winding through it all! Children and adults will delight in the detailed toy town vignettes. Look for plants chosen for their specific geometric shapes to complement the toy blocks. ■





# FOR THE LOVE OF NATURE

## Craft Chocolate From Bean to Bar: Interview with Dan Bieser from Tabal Chocolate

Between holiday indulgences and brisk hot cocoa weather, winter is the perfect time to celebrate chocolate. The bean of the Theobroma cacao tree is the most important ingredient in chocolate. A beautiful Theobroma cacao tree lives in our very own Tropical Dome. To learn more about our Theobroma and how its fruit becomes chocolate, we interviewed local artisan chocolate maker Dan Bieser from Tabal Chocolate.

### 1. How did you get your start?

In the Spring of 2012, I started my chocolate journey with a spring break trip to Toronto where I was exposed to the craft

of bean to bar chocolate making. The wonderful people at ChocoSol Chocolate invited me to learn about chocolate making and horizontal trading of cacao beans. I returned home with some basic knowledge, a few tools, and some Mexican cacao beans. I started making chocolate in the back room of our home and was quickly invited to move operations to the garage. In the Summer of 2012, I found a commercial space at Amaranth Cafe to begin our chocolate making as a business.

### 2. What can you tell us about the Theobroma cacao tree?

The Theobroma cacao tree is the only tree that produces the

beans used for traditional chocolate. Craft chocolate makers prefer fine flavor cacao grown in Central and South America. The cacao tree takes 3-5 years to grow from seedling to a fruiting tree. Cacao trees can live in excess of 100 years but their productivity diminishes over time. Beans are harvested in the spring and fall.

### 3. How do you choose who and where to get your cocoa beans from?

When I travel to Peru, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua I meet farmers that are growing some amazingly flavorful

*Continued on page 7*

*Theobroma Cacao Tree and Cacao Beans*



# Craft Chocolate From Bean to Bar

*Continued from page 6*

cacao. The challenge is building a relationship with those farmers, getting samples to test, and ultimately figuring out the logistics of getting the cacao to Tabal Chocolate. We source cacao from the best producers in the world through word-of-mouth and sometimes they also contact Tabal on their own.

## 4. Other than cocoa bean trees, are there other ingredients that you select or research as carefully as you do your cocoa?

As Craft Chocolate Makers, we make the chocolate from the cacao bean. We also use nutrient-dense and exotic, flavorful ingredients like organic teas, whole vanilla beans, macambo (a close relative of Theobroma cacao), sacha inchi, lacuma (a Peruvian fruit), and many other superfoods. We research carefully and source these specialty ingredients from small scale farmers.



## 5. What's the best part about owning Tabal Chocolate and making craft chocolate?

The best part of making chocolate at Tabal is the opportunity to be creative in developing craft chocolate as a food. Single origin cacao offers a lifetime of variations and possibilities in chocolate making. We love to share our passion through

teaching and relationship building. The sweet chocolate smell of a hard days work lingers long after we arrive home.

Visit The Domes to see a Theobroma cacao tree, to enjoy the tropical climate they prefer, and to purchase Tabal chocolate from our gift shop.

For more information about Tabal Chocolate, visit [Tabalchocolate.com](http://Tabalchocolate.com). ■

## Learn More About Chocolate and Plants in Our Adult Ed Classes

Want to learn more about chocolate? The Education Center periodically holds chocolate workshops with Dan from Tabal and other classes on a variety of plant related topics. Go to [www.MilwaukeeDomes.org](http://www.MilwaukeeDomes.org) to learn more. ■



# ALL THINGS MEMBERSHIP

## Conservatory Circle Benefits Members and The Domes

For those of our members looking for ways to support the future of The Domes, we offer the Conservatory Circle. Six higher levels of membership provide a variety of special benefits and unparalleled perks, from VIP passes to your name on a train car during the annual train show!

Your annual membership dues support the mission of Friends of the Domes as we work to cultivate a lifelong love of nature for every person who visits our world-class conservatory. Specific programming that is

supported by your membership includes school field trips, family programs such as Storytime at The Domes, cultural events such as Day of the Dead, and so much more!

Funds raised by the Friends of the Domes have made facility improvements possible, helped to maintain and improve the plant and animal collection, and supported special training opportunities for Parks' horticulturists. Our team is also involved in vital conversations about the future of Mitchell Park, The Domes, and the ne-

cessity of a publicly accessible conservatory in Milwaukee.

The Conservatory Circle starts at just \$125 annually and includes many special benefits.

For more information, visit our website at [www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/membership](http://www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/membership).

If you would like to upgrade your membership, please email us at [FOD@MilwaukeeDomes.org](mailto:FOD@MilwaukeeDomes.org) or call (414) 257-5608. ■

## Thank You to Our Corporate Partners

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our valued partners whose generous support enables us to host wonderful cultural and special events at the Mitchell Park Domes. If you're interested in becoming a partner, please reach out to Maddie Mueller at [Maddie.FOD@MilwaukeeDomes.org](mailto:Maddie.FOD@MilwaukeeDomes.org). ■



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# Thank You Conservatory Circle Members

We extend a warm thank you to those who choose to be a member of the Mitchell Park Domes Conservatory Circle. These donor-level memberships fuel our mission!

## Platinum Beauty

Robert & Shawn Buending  
Liz & Larry Fehring  
Karen Luedke  
O'Leary-Guth Law Office,  
S.C.  
Linda L. & Richard J.  
Stevens

## Golden Geranium

Caroline & Barbara  
Barrow  
Jitendra & Gita Baruah  
James & Judith Callan  
Michael & Carol Hecker  
Roger Krawiecki  
Eileen & Kristian Nysome  
Beverly Smiley  
Lillian Wiegel & Barbara  
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James & Kathleen Wing

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Richard & Carol Bayerlein  
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Gail Schumann & Michael  
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Patricia Warchol

## Bronze Fennel

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Walsh  
Ellen & Robert Bladorn  
William & Barbara Boles  
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Christy & William Breihan  
Brian & Nicole Brzezinski  
Jane Buttars  
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Compton  
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Lori & Kerry Worden  
Linda & Donald Yorde  
Kathleen & Peter Zarwell  
Gertrude Zauner  
Gail & James Ziemann

## Meet Parks Exhibit Designer and Show Dome Artist: Mel Lancy

I am the exhibit designer for Milwaukee County Parks. In this role, I develop the themes for the floral shows at The Domes and artistically support other Parks locations as needed. I am the only exhibit designer on the Parks' staff.

My role has a direct influence on the artistic vision for the floral exhibits. I enjoy working in this fast-paced environment with forward-thinking individuals while maintaining the autonomy to develop artwork for each show. With each production, we aim to create an immersive environment that reflects a symbiotic union between plant life, art and the viewer.

My passion lies in transforming two-dimensional designs into actual three-dimensional creations. I received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design where I studied illustration and architecture. Upon graduation, I explored the commercial scenic industry creating sculptures and scenery for zoos, theme parks, museums, and other locations.

I also worked as a production designer for various theaters, colleges, and high schools throughout the Chicago area. I developed my talents there, but I knew I wanted to live in a community more tied to nature. Wisconsin feels like a place that intertwines the importance of experiencing nature and celebrating the changing seasons.



*Mel in her workshop studio at The Domes. Creativity is a must in this job. Here, Mel is transforming sheep from a past show into polar bears for the Winter Show.*

In 2015, we moved to Milwaukee. After my daughter was born, we would take daily adventures to parks and festivals in the area. We have been to more than 75 different Milwaukee County Parks. The Domes became one of our favorites and was even the location of the photo for our first family Christmas card after she was born. Little did I know that one day I would be the artist working on the shows!

When I plan shows, I work closely with the Horticultural Services Director for The Domes, Doris Maki, and the lead horticulturist of the Show Dome, Emily Lambercht. We enjoy exploring creative, new ways to engage the space and the public.

Emily and I work in tandem to

present, research, and develop theme ideas for each show years in advance of the show opening. I focus on the overall vision for the show and the visitor experience. I source or create any props needed to define the space and present the theme. Emily and I plan how best to arrange the plants and props to form a symbiotic connection between the two. It is that magical merger that really helps transform each show into its own unique experience.

Designing for The Domes allows me to create immersive environments; use art and plants to tell interesting and educational stories; and inspire the protection of our natural world. ■



# FROM THE EDUCATION CENTER

## Bader Philanthropies Grant Supports Older Adult Programming: Growing And Thriving

**S**PARK! at The Domes and the Growing and Thriving Workshop are two exciting programs that have been helping older adults connect with others and nature, thanks to a grant from Bader Philanthropies. This is the second of a two-part article that highlights these special opportunities.

In this issue, we highlight the Growing and Thriving Workshop.

Being at The Domes surrounded by plants makes us feel better. In fact, according to public health researchers, connecting to nature is not just a fun pastime, it is critical to our emotional and physical well-being. It reduces feelings of anger, fear and stress. It also contributes to physical health, reducing blood pressure and stress-related illnesses.

The Friends of the Domes Growing and Thriving Workshop is a free program that helps older adults receive these health benefits. Offered four times per year (once in Spanish), participants receive a brief history of The Domes, information about the

benefits of caring for a plant, and a tour of the Tropical Dome. They also get a basic lesson in houseplant husbandry. Attendees also are able to select a tropical plant to repot and take home with them. The plants are placed in a beautiful, handmade pot (thanks to a partnership with La Familia de Arte).

One past participant had this to say about the program: “Just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your class yesterday. Continuing to learn new things is a goal of mine, and I learned two new things! Also, every time I look at my new plant, I smile.

Thank you for making my day.”

The next workshops will be offered Jan 18, 2024 (in Spanish) and June 15, 2024 (in English). Advanced registration is required. To find out more, visit [www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/olderadults](http://www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/olderadults) or call (414) 257-5608. ■



**Older adults may register for the January 18 or June 15 Growing & Thriving Workshop with the QR code on the right or go to [www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/olderadults](http://www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/olderadults) or call (414) 257-5608**



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**2023 HOLIDAY SHOW:  
A HOLIDAY SNOW GLOBE  
NOV 17-JAN 7, 2024**

The Show Dome becomes  
a Snow Globe in this year's  
Holiday Floral Show!



**AN ELEGANT AUCTION  
TO BENEFIT THE DOMES  
FEB 10, 2024**

Domes-themed food  
stations, cocktails,  
entertainment, an exquisite  
seated dessert and auction  
in the starlit greenhouse.



**2024 TRAIN SHOW:  
TOYBLOX TINY TOWNS  
JAN 20-MARCH 17, 2024**

We are celebrating toys and  
blocks of all kinds during the  
Train Show in the Show Dome.