

Fall 2025

Inside the Domes

Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory



We have welcomed **253,417 visitors** to the Domes this past year!



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**Fall
Floral
Show,
Mythical
Menagerie**

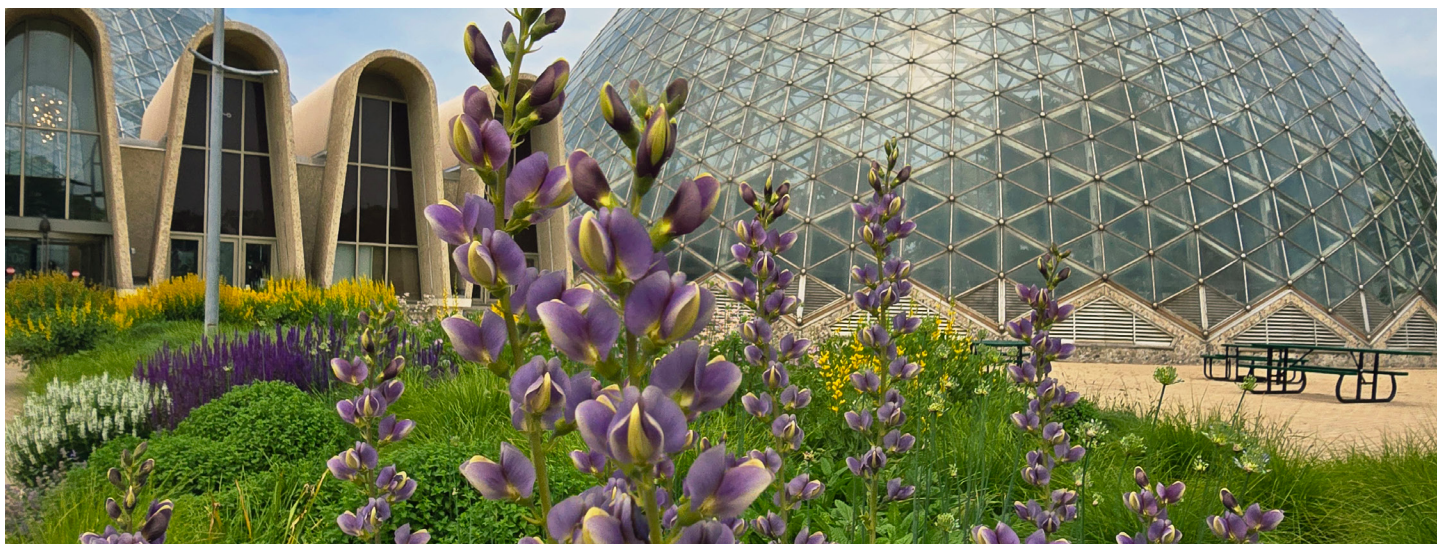


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News From the Domes



Reimagining our Beloved Domes: A Conversation About the County's Investment

By: Christa Beall Diefenbach

As there are a lot of changes on the horizon, I wanted to take this opportunity to share important information with our closest of friends.

You may have seen the announcement that County Executive David Crowley, along with Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson, signed a bill on July 30, 2025, to officially adopt the Domes Reimagined plan. 🎉

This includes a \$30 million commitment toward the \$115 million needed for the first phase of the restoration project. I have had several people of late ask me why the County, given its fiscal challenges, is committing to this investment.

Great question—and something I would like each of you, as our ambassadors, to be able to answer. After reading this, you will be able to explain to your family, neighbors, and friends why the Domes Reimagined plan is the most fiscally responsible option for Milwaukee County.

◇ First, it is important to note that this was **not a decision between investing \$0 or \$30 million**. If the Domes Reimagined project were NOT to happen, the County would still need to pay to demolish the Domes. Demolition and a splash pad alone would cost \$18 million. For just \$12 million more, we are able to maintain this amazing community asset.

◇ Second, the plan **takes the Domes off the County's list of obligations**. Currently, the County covers an annual deficit budget of \$1 million+ to operate its portion of the Domes. In the future, all operations will be managed by Milwaukee Domes Alliance. We can operate the conservatory in a sustainable manner that allows us to save for future maintenance needs.

◇ Finally, the County's commitment is **being matched with other investments nearly \$3 to \$1**. Now, that is a return on investment!

The Domes Reimagined plan is not just exciting—it *is smart*. Which is why it has bipartisan support at



both the local and state level.

I encourage you to join the blog that will be issuing updates by scanning the QR code to the left.

I often say Domes Reimagined is a plan “for Milwaukee, by Milwaukee.” It is because of you that we have made such great progress. And for that, I am forever grateful. ■

Meet Leah Chybowski: Greenhouse Horticulturist

With a background in botany, ethnobotany, and international resource management from UW–Stevens Point, Leah brings a wealth of experience to the Domes—from urban and aquaponic farms, to fieldwork in Mexico, Ecuador and Belize, to commercial greenhouse production, and plant surveys for the National Parks Service. Leah’s background is perfectly suited to take on the challenge of growing the wide variety of arid, tropical, and perennial plants that we have onsite.

Now in her third year at the Domes, Leah helps manage



our greenhouses and oversees plant production for both our permanent collection as well as the plants we care for on behalf of Boerner Botanical Gardens - often starting plants from seed. She especially loves our Day of the Dead marigolds, which are grown pesticide-free using beneficial insects.

Nearly all of the water used in the greenhouse comes from collected rainwater—a fact that often surprises visitors. Leah’s favorite place in the Domes? The greenhouses, of course. She also enjoys the stapeliads that grace the arid dome when they bloom—a unique flower with a scent that attracts flies, much like a mini corpse flower.

Outside of work, she loves hiking, gardening, and taking in Wisconsin’s native plants, landscapes, rocks and birds. We are so glad to have Leah as part of the team! ■

To the left: Leah Chybowski in one of the six growing greenhouses that are adjacent to the Domes.

Upcoming Events

Storytime in the Lobby
Every Wed, 10AM
(no registration required)

SPARK!
Oct 21, 10-11:30AM
Oct 22, 1:30-3PM
Nov 18, 10-11:30AM
Nov 19, 1:30-3PM

Día de los Muertos
(Day of the Dead)
Oct 31, 6-9PM

**Winter in the Tropics
A Family Fun Fest**
Dec 30, 9AM-12PM

**Winning Design: Treasures
Through Time Gala**
Feb 21, 2026

Art in the Green
April 25-26, 2026

SHOW DOME EXHIBITS

*Show Dome closed
between exhibit changes.*

Mythical Menagerie
Sep 20 - Nov 9

Floral Holiday Show
Nov 22, 2025 - Jan 4, 2026

Train Show
Jan 17 - March 22, 2026 ■



Scan here for event info
and registration.

Spotlight on the Voodoo Lily (*Amorphophallus konjac*)

The Voodoo Lily (*Amorphophallus konjac*) is a smaller—but no less impressive—relative of the giant Corpse Flower. Also known as Devil's Tongue, Dragon Plant, and Elephant Yam, this fascinating species is native to the tropical and subtropical regions of China.

The plant grows from an edible underground tuber, similar to a potato, which has long been

used in Japanese and Chinese cooking. The tuber is processed into flour for noodles or used as a vegan gelatin alternative to create a firm, fruity jelly.

Like its larger cousin, the Voodoo Lily boasts a notorious bloom: its flower emits a powerful scent of rotting meat to attract carrion flies for pollination. Though smaller in size, this plant's bloom makes a big impression! ■



Photo courtesy of Lindsey M. McKee

Shop the Domes - Anytime, Anywhere!



If you've explored our in-person gift shop, Gifts Under Glass, you already know it's full of locally made goods, handcrafted jewelry, eco-friendly toys, garden supplies, and more. But did you know many of these special finds are also available online?

From hand-poured candles and enamel pins to tote bags and t-shirts, our online shop features a collection of unique Domes merchandise. Perfect for a birthday gift or special occasion for a Domes-lover in your life—or for treating yourself with a little Milwaukee pride.



Shop Now



Have ideas for what you'd love to see in our online shop? Reach out to: CHarrison@MilwaukeeDomes.org.

Frequently Asked Questions

Harvested Fruits from the Domes



What do you do with the fruit grown at the Domes?

Harvested fruits from the Domes are usually left to grow intact on the plant so visitors can learn and observe them growing as they would in nature. A few select fruits (mainly bananas, since we have so many of them!) are harvested regularly. ■



A Deeper Meaning Behind Our New Look

When we transitioned from Friends of the Domes to the Milwaukee Domes Alliance earlier this year, many of you had questions about our new logo. And we have answers!

The new Milwaukee Domes Alliance logo has a lot to say about the work we do.

Domes Structures. The domes structures are front and center. The overlapping represents the important role we play in connecting our community to both nature and each other.

Center Outline. The outline in the center represents both a flower and a person. We recognize that, although the Domes is certainly a tourist destination, it is also a hub for the people of Milwaukee. It is a place for families to form deep



connections with each other and with nature.

Hidden Letters. As a celebration of our new name, the letters “M” “D” and “A” of Milwaukee Domes Alliance are hidden within the logo itself.

Milwaukee Domes Alliance (formerly Friends of the Domes) is the nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory as it enters a new era.

As Alliance members, you are a crucial part of the Domes’ future.

Our evolution reflects the organization’s broader mission to inspire meaningful connections to nature and community, while advancing efforts to preserve and reimagine Milwaukee’s beloved Mitchell Park Domes.

Learn more about our work and how you can get involved at DomesReimagined.org. ■



For the Love of Nature

Sustainable Lawn Care

By: Melinda Myers

Proper mowing is key to growing a healthy sustainable lawn. Making a few simple changes in your mowing practices can make a big difference in your lawn's health and its impact on the environment.

Raise the mowing height of your lawn to 3 to 4 inches if you haven't already done so. Taller grass grows deeper roots, is more drought tolerant, more resistant to pests and better able to compete with weeds.

Mow often, removing no more than one third the total height whenever possible to reduce the stress on grass. Leave clippings on the lawn and if needed mow over long clippings a second time. A season's worth of clippings equals one fertilizer application and adds moisture and organic matter to the soil with each pass of the mower.

Make sure the blades are sharp. This eliminates ragged edges that look bad and are bad for your lawn's health. Plus, you'll save money and be kind to the environment. Cutting with sharp blades and regularly cleaning your mower deck increases fuel efficiency. You'll use up to 22% less fuel and the grass will need up to 30% less water. Consider

using a push or electric mower that's good for the waistline as well as the environment.

Take it a step further by conserving water and allowing your lawn to go dormant during extended dry periods. It will recover but try to minimize foot traffic and play on the dormant lawn. Don't apply herbicides and fertilizer

when the lawn is dormant as they both can damage the grass and the fertilizer feeds the weeds.

Always sweep grass clippings and fertilizer residue off the walks and drives. This simple step keeps unwanted nutrients out of waterways and eventually our drinking water. ■



Melinda Myers with her grandchildren, Sam, Roy, Cayden, and Santiago, posing in front of the Mitchell Conservatory display in the Show Dome.

From the Education Center

Cristo Rey Students Help the Domes Bloom

Since 2022, the Milwaukee Domes Alliance has hosted Cristo Rey Jesuit High School students through their Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP). CWSP allows student interns to work with local organizations to gain experience aligned to their personal and professional goals. Last year, four students supported the Domes: Linsy Contreras Figueroa, Jhovany Cortez, Angela Flores, and Yasmin Avalos Gonzalez. These students have brought enthusiasm, care, and a strong work ethic to their daily tasks, contributing immensely to both our Education department and our Fundraising team.



In the Ed Center, students make sure everything is running smoothly several days a week, while also greeting families and interacting with guests. They also organize materials for school field trips and Family Fun Fest events, support themes and installations,



and clean and reset the Ed Center daily. Some have even taken the lead—like Linsy, who overcame her initial shyness to lead Story Time monthly, or Angela, who translated signage to expand accessibility to our visitors and was named Cristo Rey’s Student of the Month in February 2025. Meanwhile, Jhovany assists our Fund Development Manager with research projects and preparation for our events.

The students also get to enjoy working in our one-of-a-kind living museum. As Yasmin shared, “When I walk the Domes, it helps me relax. I can just walk amongst the trees and the

flowers and it’s very peaceful.”

Their dedication to the Domes doesn’t stop there. Several students have volunteered additional hours outside their assigned shifts, helping with Día de los Muertos, Art in the Green, and our other events. With gratitude and admiration, we celebrate our future leaders who help the Domes grow while growing alongside us. We look forward to continuing this partnership for many seasons to come. ■

*Left photo: Cristo Rey student Linsy, helping in the Ed Center
Top photo: Cristo Rey student Yasmin, in the Tropical Dome*



524 S. Layton Blvd.
Milwaukee, WI 53215

Phone: (414) 257-5608

E-mail: info@MilwaukeeDomes.org

Website: www.MilwaukeeDomes.org

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Upcoming Events at the Domes

Día de los Muertos: OCT 31, 6-9PM

Día de los Muertos is a joyful celebration of life that takes place each November 1st and 2nd. The Aztecs developed the ritual some 3,000 years ago because they believed one should not grieve the loss of a

beloved ancestor who passed, but celebrate their lives and welcome the return of their spirits to the land of the living once a year.

Come honor and celebrate this cultural holiday at the Domes this year! Our annual Día de los Muertos event will have traditional ofrendas created by students from the surrounding community, a Mariachi band, Día de los Muertos dancers, local food and art vendors, as well as an opportunity for attendees to create ofrenda elements to take home and

celebrate the holiday in their own homes.

This popular event typically sells out quickly, so members are encouraged to purchase tickets in advance.



To the left: Traditional Aztec dancers performing during Day of the Dead at the Domes 2024.

