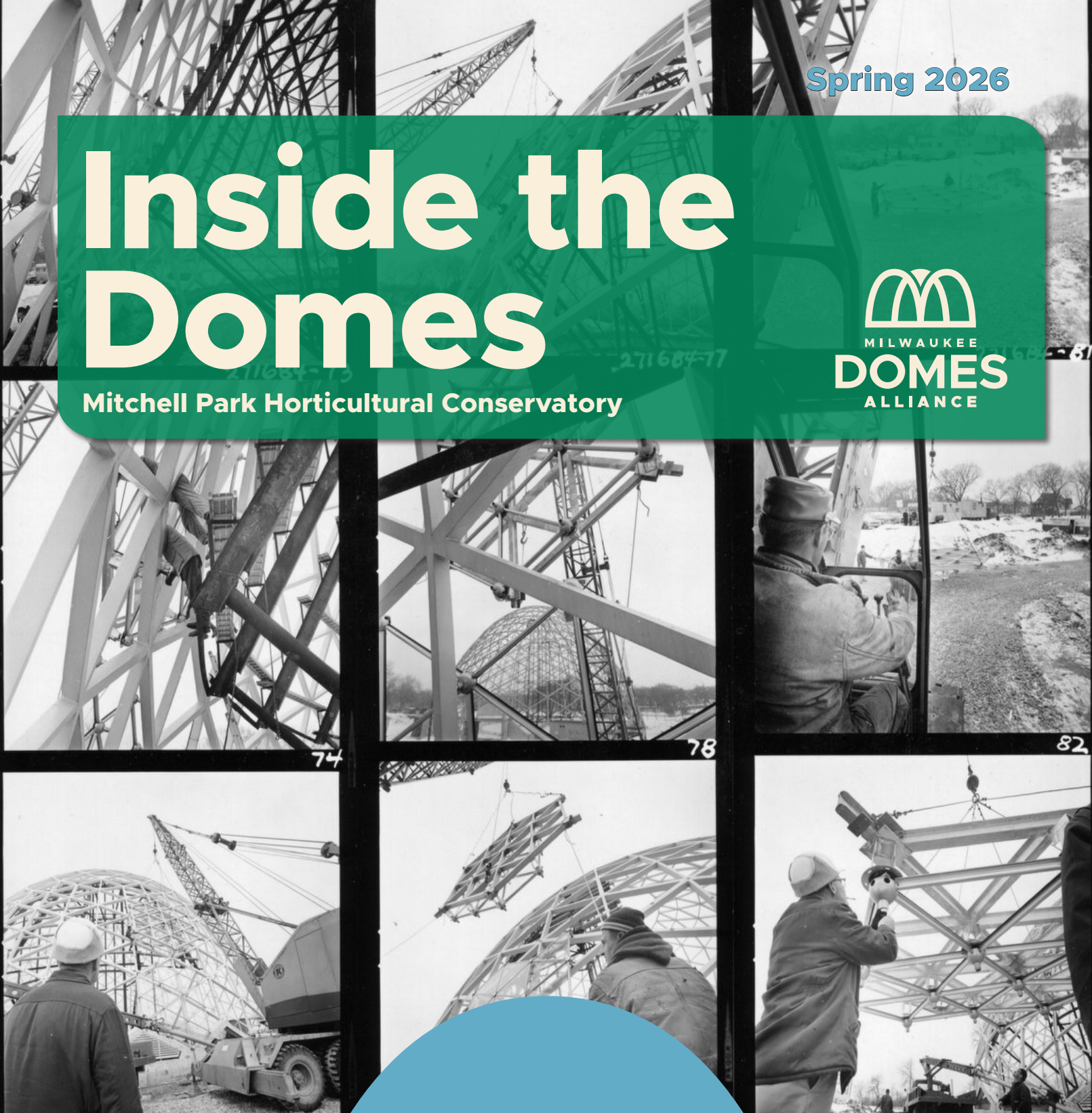


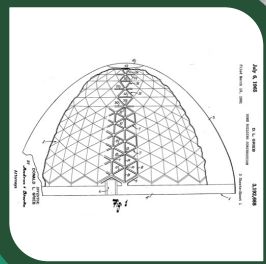
Spring 2026

Inside the Domes

Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory



ART in the GREEN
April 25-26



DOMES REIMAGINED
Pages 2-3



FUN WITH FROGS
Page 7



SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE
Pages 8-9



UPCOMING EVENTS
Page 10

News From the Domes

A Message from the CEO: An Insider's View of the Domes Reimagined Plan

By: Christa Beall Diefenbach, CEO, Milwaukee Domes Alliance



We are pleased to announce that the Domes Reimagined is not just a plan—but **a plan in full bloom**. As an important insider, we wanted to give you a sneak peek.

Design Status: We finished the initial designs in spring of 2025. Since then, we have moved into “schematic design.” This phase allows the architects to refine the conceptual designs based on feedback from our many internal and external stakeholders. Watch your

email for an invitation to participate in a member-only update webinar this summer.

National Register: We submitted the application for the National Register of Historic Places, and the feedback has been positive.

Project Funding: The total project cost for Domes Reimagined Phase 1 is \$115 million. Last year, Milwaukee County invested \$30 million toward this effort. These funds, along with more than \$30 million in tax credit financing, will address the

deferred maintenance portions of the project.

We are in the silent phase of a capital campaign with a goal of raising \$35 million. These funds will be used to add many new amenities, including a new café, expanded gift shop, and interactive children’s garden. The outpouring of community support has been inspiring. To learn more about the capital campaign, please email our Advancement Director, Kathy Kortes at KKortes@MilwaukeeDomes.org.

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

Timeline: Domes Reimagined Phase 1 has three distinct phases—one for each dome. We will start with the Show Dome, breaking ground 2027-2028. This phase will take about two years to complete, and will replace all 2,000 panes of glass and seals in the Show Dome. We will also replace the walkways and enhance the gardens. This is also when we will add many of the new amenities to the facility. Once the Show Dome Phase is complete, we will

move to the Desert Dome followed by the Tropical Dome. The entire project will take about six years to complete.

About Memberships: The facility will remain open during construction, and we will have MANY wonderful programs and activities to keep the community coming back. Please be sure to renew your membership during construction as it is critical to our operations.

Thank You: Now more than ever, we all need restorative spaces that create community

and build family. Thank you for believing in the restorative power of the Domes. Together we can shepherd in an exciting new future where the Domes will become the **epicenter for peace and wellness** for everyone in our community. ■

Image at Top of Page 2: Rendering of Little Sprouts Children's Garden (Photo Credit: TKWA)

Welwitschia mirabilis: A Wonderfully Weird Arid Plant

By: Justine Miller, Domes Horticulturist—Arid Collection

In the Desert Dome's African collection, you will find six small plants that consist only of a taproot, a woody stem, and two long, curling leaves. This species is *Welwitschia mirabilis*, a strange and very long-lived plant endemic to the Namib Desert on the western coast of Namibia and Angola.

The plants only produce one set of true leaves which grow for their entire life, usually becoming ragged and split in the elements. Our specimens were planted in 2022 and are still babies; the leaves of older plants can grow to a length of 13 feet! The species is thought to go back to the Jurassic period,

and individual plants can live hundreds of years. The oldest plants currently on the planet could be up to 2,000 years old. In the wild, *Welwitschia* provides emergency food and moisture for large mammals such as rhinos and springbok, cover for reptiles and arthropods, and nesting sites for birds. ■



Photos of the Welwitschia mirabilis taken from inside of the Desert Dome

Wonder by Design: The Architecture of the Domes

By: Irina Ioffe, Director of Marketing, Milwaukee Domes Alliance



through to the plants below. At the center of each Dome, a single compression ring holds the entire structure together, allowing it to rise eight stories high with no interior columns interrupting your view.

So, when the pressures of the day-to-day are too much, remember: there's a place in Milwaukee engineered, down to the ceiling height, to give your spirit exactly the breath it needs. Called the "Cathedral Effect," it is the proven phenomenon that soaring spaces open the mind toward creativity, wonder, and possibility. Step inside. Look up. Be inspired. ■

That moment when you step from the lobby into a Dome and instinctively look up? It's designed.

Architect Donald Grieb and engineer Charles Smith Whitney planned it that way—every proportion calibrated to shift something in you the moment you arrive. The lobby's lower ceilings compress the space intentionally, so the moment you cross the threshold the world opens—you feel it before you understand it.

Built between 1964 and 1967, the Mitchell Park Domes are believed to be the first conoidal glass domes ever constructed, and they remain the only ones built to house ornamental horticulture. Most architectural landmarks are meant to be admired for how they look. This one was built to be admired for how it makes you feel—to envelop you in light and space that gives your spirit room to soar, grounding you to the lush, living things around you.

Next time you're inside, notice how those hundreds of triangular panes work together to distribute structural forces evenly, letting light pour



Meet the Team: New Milwaukee Domes Alliance Staff



Irina Ioffe, *Marketing Director*

Every time I step into the Domes, I glance up at the soaring architecture, feel the warmth on my skin, inhale the perfume of the flowers, and take in the vibrant life around me. It invigorates my imagination and keeps me grounded in the moment. One of my favorite aspects of being here is hearing the stories people share about the Domes—childhood visits, family traditions, and transformative personal moments. Those memories are what make this place part of the fabric of our community. Please keep sharing your stories. I love hearing them.



Laura Emir, *Chief Development Officer*

Like so many of us, I grew up visiting the Domes. In my case, all the way from Northern Illinois. The Domes were the backdrop of many cherished childhood memories and when I moved to Milwaukee and started my own family, it became a place I loved to take my children. Three generations of my family now have fond memories of visiting this iconic Milwaukee treasure and experiencing the warmth and wonder of the Domes. Working here and being part of its next chapter, is a love letter to my family and our entire community.



Yesi Pérez, *Bilingual Interpretive Educator & Education Outreach Manager*

I enjoy being surrounded by nature within an area so critical to my neighborhood—Mitchell Park and the Menomonee Valley. These spaces are such important resources for our community, and having the opportunity to foster a deeper love and connection with our natural environment through education is a way to honor all those who cared for and stewarded this land before me. Nature is our best teacher, and I am so lucky to share these teachings with guests and neighbors of the Domes. ■

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The Buzz About the Spring Show

By: Melania Lancy, Domes Exhibit Designer



Milwaukee County Parks Natural Areas Department has spent years quietly documenting something extraordinary happening right beneath our feet—and above our flowers. It turns out our urban park system has become one of the most important strongholds for native bee populations in the entire state. Tucked between farmland and freeways, these 10,000+ acres of natural areas offer something increasingly rare: refuge. And the bees? They've repaid us in full, delivering the kind of ecosystem services that no technology can replicate. But here's what many people don't realize—the conservation story doesn't stop at the park's edge. Your backyard garden, your neighbor's window box, the pollinator strip down

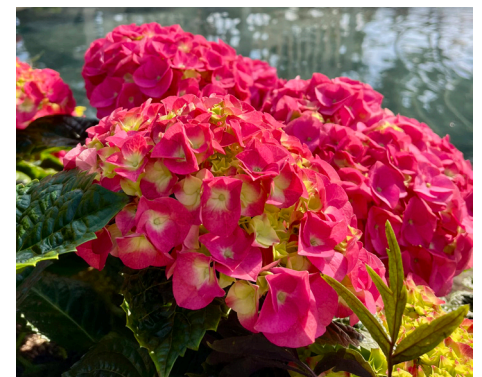
the block—every bloom in Milwaukee County is part of something bigger.



And this spring, that story has a home at the Domes. *BEES!* highlights several types of native Wisconsin bees in a landscape fit for a bumblebee's playground.

Surrounded by hydrangeas, spring bulbs, and eight one-of-a-kind bee sculptures made from recycled metal. Discover the vital role these incredible pollinators play in our gardens, ecosystems, and lives by visiting the Domes this spring. Beauty is in the eye of the BEE-holder. *BEES!* will be on display from April 4 through May 25, 2026. ■

Please note that there are no live bees in the Domes.



From the Education Center

Animal Educators Inspire Creativity

When visitors stop by the Domes Education Center this spring, they may notice a new frog-themed comic bringing the world of amphibians to life. The artwork was created by Linsy Contreras, a Cristo Rey student intern who works in the Education Center at the Domes. Linsy loves both drawing and learning about nature.



In the comic, a curious frog journeys through all three Domes, discovering interesting plants, flowers, and hidden details along the way. As the frog explores each environment, it invites young visitors to notice the incredible biodiversity and



unique features that make the Domes such a special place to learn and explore.

Working with the Domes education team, Linsy designed the comic to spark curiosity and encourage students to look more closely at the living collections around them. To build on that curiosity, visitors are invited to participate in a

frog naming contest by visiting www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/frogs or scanning the QR code below.

This student-led project is one more way that the Education Center helps visitors build meaningful connections to nature through creativity, curiosity, and discovery. ■

Help Us Name Our Newest Animal Educators



Santa Isabel
NAME: _____



Santa Isabel
NAME: _____



Marquette-Colored Hybrid
NAME: _____



Blue Azureus
NAME: _____



Fine-Spot Leucamelas
NAME: _____



SCAN to enter the contest!

For the Love of Nature

Sustainable Landscape Design and Care

By: Melinda Myers, Milwaukee Domes Alliance Member and Nationally-Recognized Speaker

Sustainable landscape design and care is one way we can help conserve our resources, reduce waste, and grow a beautiful and healthy landscape. Working together we can help minimize our negative impact on the environment and promote

healthier outcomes when planning, planting, and caring for our outdoor spaces.

Creating a sustainable garden and landscape starts from the ground up. Boost your soil's health with the addition of compost. Spread a layer of compost over your lawn and existing gardens or

incorporate it into the soil adding nutrients and organic matter. Compost improves drainage in heavy soils, increases water holding ability in fast draining soils, and improves the soil's ability to absorb rainwater. This means

Continued on page 9



Continued from page 8

more water stays on your landscape for your plants and less runs off into our storm sewers and waterways.

Keep the soil covered year-round with mulch and/or plants to help protect it from erosion and compaction. Growing a variety of plants and keeping the soil filled with roots year-round supports the soil microbes that help create healthy soil. As the old roots decompose, they add organic matter and create pathways for stormwater to enter the soil. As the water travels past the roots and through the soil much of the dust and pollutants are removed along the way.

Selecting the right plant suited to the growing conditions and available space is also key to creating a sustainable landscape. You'll invest less time and effort to grow healthy plants that have fewer problems and require less resources. Include native plants whenever possible and appropriate for the space and growing conditions. Look for those that are less aggressive if gardening space is limited. Start by adding one or two to existing gardens as opportunities arise. Then consider creating a garden of native plants. You'll be amazed at the increase in pollinators, beneficial insects, and songbirds that follow.

Help keep rainwater on your landscape and out of our storm sewers and waterways. Always contact your local municipality for any restrictions or benefits related to incorporating any of

these in your landscape design and maintenance.



Use rain barrels to capture storm water and use for ornamental plantings. Link several together to help maximize the amount of water you can collect for later use. Consider adding a rain garden to your landscape. These specially designed gardens help capture storm water runoff that drains within 24 hours helping plants and cleaning the water as it passes through to the ground water below.

Plant trees if space allows to help manage storm water and reduce energy use. According to the U.S. Dept. of Energy: "A well-placed tree, shrub, or vine can deliver effective shade, act as a windbreak, and reduce your energy bills. Carefully positioned trees can save up to 25% of the energy a typical house uses."

Start a compost pile if you do not already have one. Convert disease-free and insect-free plant debris and plant-based kitchen scraps into a valuable

soil amendment. Don't add annual weeds gone to seed, perennial weeds, and invasive plants to your compost as most of our compost piles don't kill these and these problems end up back in the garden. Keep meat, bones, and dairy that attract rodents out of the compost pile. Check with your local municipality as some require specific composters in their communities.



Making a few changes in the way we design, plant, and tend our landscapes can have a big impact on the environment. Working together we can help create a better environment for future generations. ■

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including the "Midwest Gardener's Handbook" and "Small Space Gardening." On "The Great Courses," she hosts the popular course "How to Grow Anything." Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for "Birds & Blooms" magazine. Visit her at www.MelindaMyers.com.

Photo Credit Pages 8-9: Melinda Myers

Upcoming Events at the Domes

Storytime in the Lobby

Every Wed, 10AM
(No registration required.)

Wacky Wednesdays

First Wed each month

Bilingual Storytime

Last Wed each month

SPARK!

April 21, 10-11:30AM

May 19, 10-11:30AM

(Free for those with memory loss and their caregivers; pre-registration required.)

Art in the Green

April 25-26, 9AM-4PM

SHOW DOME EXHIBITS

Show Dome closed
between exhibit changes.

Summer Show

June 6 - Sep 7

Fall Show

Sep 19 - Nov 8



Scan here
for event
info and
registration.

Art in the Green Returns to the Domes



There's something that happens inside the Domes during Art in the Green that's hard to describe. The glass explodes with color that isn't just botanical...it's canvases, ceramics, hand-turned wood, handcrafted jewelry, and more. Local artists selling their one-of-a-kind designs in the greenhouse while visitors eat, shop, enjoy a cocktail, and listen to live music.



Creativity has always been part of what makes the Domes special, but this weekend the entire conservatory is truly a celebration of beauty.

April 25th and 26th, join us as we host Milwaukee's favorite art fair, just in time for Mother's Day.

As a member, your admission is free. Your membership does more than support our operations... it keeps fun celebrations like Art in the Green possible. To learn more, register for tickets, or purchase tickets, scan below or visit www.MilwaukeeDomes.org/AIG. ■



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The 2026 Gala was wildly successful **raising more than \$170,000** to support the experiences, learning, and everyday moments of wonder the Domes provide year-round.



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524 S. Layton Blvd.
Milwaukee, WI 53215

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Get Involved

Fun Ways to Support the Domes!

Purchase a Paver

Leave your mark by purchasing an engraved paver at the Domes. Part of the walkway in the Show Dome, proceeds

from the pavers support the work of the Milwaukee Domes Alliance, including educational programming and our world-class plant collection.

Join the Greenhouse Guild

Help preserve this portal to the natural world, by joining our monthly donor group, the Greenhouse Guild. You'll experience first-hand the satisfaction of being a part of the team ensuring that the Mitchell Park Domes are here for generations to come! ■

