

IKEBANA INTERNATIONAL CHAPTER #160, NAPLES FL AND THE NAPLES BOTANICAL GARDEN

BACKGROUND

The Naples Ikebana Chapter #160 had held their exhibit for many years (10+) at local churches. The Naples Chapters had 80-100 members and usually 70+ arrangements at their annual exhibit held in March of most years. Their exhibit also had a “preview party” for members, special guests and spouses. Each of the three schools of Ikebana available in Naples had a demonstration during the two-day exhibit. As the exhibit took place in churches, it was held on a Friday and Saturday, no Sundays! About three years ago, the Naples Ikebana chapter was facing some serious issues with dwindling attendance at their exhibit (less than 300 people) but rising costs associated with the exhibit (upwards of \$3500 in rent and related expenses). We were also faced with difficulty in finding a venue that was well located, suited space needs, was affordable and where we could agree on mutually convenient dates. Understandably working around a church calendar presented some challenges. In addition, we needed to find more affordable monthly meeting space as churches in the area, were significantly increasing their meeting room charges to over \$300 per day.

RESOLUTION

One of our members was closely associated with the Naples Botanical Garden and she reached out to the Garden asking about the possibility of a relationship. The Garden was more than happy to help our chapter with meeting space at much more affordable rate (\$150 per meeting) and a place to hold our exhibit FOR FREE!

The decision to move our meetings and exhibit to this location was a slam-dunk!

We had some challenges to meet:

- The meeting space was a bit further drive for many of our members.
 - Many have adjusted and some just don't come as often
 - We cut our meeting space costs by more than half
- The meeting space wouldn't allow us to serve coffee during our hospitality period prior to all our monthly meetings (no kitchen nearby or space to store our coffee pots and supplies)
 - We were able to bring in “morning treats” and our members simply had their coffee at home or brought it with them.
- Our meeting dates had to be juggled a little bit to accommodate some major Garden events.
 - With multiple email communications and our website, we were able to make certain our members got used to these changes
- We had to move our exhibit from March to February and our annual luncheon with demonstration to March from February
 - This was an easy decision because we no longer had to pay rent to have our exhibit!
- We could no longer have our members bring “finger food” to our preview party as the Garden has their own catering operation.
 - Our members now pay for a very nice preview party and they don't have to make an exhibit arrangement and food for the party!
 - Some of the garden staff pays and attends the party!

RESULTS

We just had our fifth year of working with the Naples Botanical Garden for our annual exhibit. In the first few years we more than exceeded our previous exhibit attendance with about 1500-2000 people seeing our exhibit the past two years. This year, 2020, the relationship grew even more. We ran a contest for having an arrangement created by one of our members to be the “image” of the exhibit theme. The Garden selected the winning image. The Garden also offered to handle all the publicity. The results in 2020 were that we had over 3000 people attend our exhibit. More than 70 people attended all of our demonstrations, and each school has some newly interested prospective students. In recent years, we have garnered new members from our monthly publicity and from our exhibit attendees. It is too early to tell what this year will bring!

This is also a win-win for the Naples Botanical Garden, this year, they broke attendance records and the “café” within the Garden broke all kinds of sales records in food sales. They were so excited that they offered all our members’ free coffee, tea, and soda on Saturday!

Bottom line – it takes some time to have these types of relationships grow and for each organization to learn how to work in harmony. It also takes someone to see the potential “reach out”!