



HILLTOP CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FAQ

What is Hilltop's mission and vision?

Mission of the LSU Hilltop Arboretum

The mission of LSU Hilltop Arboretum is to provide a sanctuary where students and visitors can learn about natural systems, plants, and landscape design.

Shared Vision

The LSU Hilltop Arboretum will be a nationally-recognized center for the study of plants and landscape design. Hilltop will build upon donor Emory Smith's love for native Louisiana plants and sanctuary. Stewardship of Hilltop is shared by the LSU Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture and the Friends of Hilltop. Hilltop is an integral part of the School which uses the arboretum in its research, teaching, and service activities. Friends of Hilltop will provide education programs to engage the broader community, operational support and fundraising activities.

Why another building?

When a needs assessment was done before the initial construction in 1999, Friends of Hilltop found that two kinds of large spaces were important to our mission —open-air (true to the spirit of Hilltop, and perfect for Spring and Fall events), and climate-controlled. The capital campaign to meet this goal fell short and we made the decision to delay the enclosed educational facility which was more expensive than the open-air pavilion. The Margaret Holmes Brown pavilion was built and the enclosed facility was postponed. The Friends have needed this facility since we built the first one, but have operated without it, just as staff worked in a trailer for years until we could build appropriate office space.

In order to meet our mission and vision for all that Hilltop can and should be, it is important to have on-site spaces that fill the programmatic requirements of LSU, Friends of Hilltop, and the larger community. The completion of this facility will position us to accelerate our growth, and to focus renewed attention upon the development of the tree and plant collections--- the true heart and soul of Hilltop.

What will the new building provide or accommodate that the current facilities don't?

Currently, Friends of Hilltop holds its large educational programs off-site because we do not have a facility appropriate for a seated lecture, with blackout capabilities and audio-visual equipment. Also, our existing kitchen is far removed from the Margaret Holmes Brown pavilion and can only accommodate cold drinks and staff lunches. Without a catering kitchen, the kind of fundraising and special events that can be held at Hilltop is limited. Cold winters, hot summers, and blowing rain are a serious impediment to event planning. We are simply not able to plan or schedule many events due to weather uncertainty. While our site naturally invites large numbers of visitors, the covered pavilion handles only one busload at a time. We are unable to have two groups touring simultaneously. There is little flexibility, for example, to receive together a class from LSU and an elementary school bus tour, or a membership function, or a plant sale. We cannot serve multiple audiences. With an enclosed, climate controlled, multi-purpose, educational facility, our ability to plan the events which allow us to fulfill our mission and grow will be greatly expanded.

How many visitors does Hilltop receive annually? How many can you currently accommodate? With the addition of the new educational facility, how many could you ideally accommodate?

Hilltop receives over five thousand visitors annually. Many arrive for educational functions or programmed events. Others come unsolicited for an afternoon walk, often with children and pets. The Margaret Holmes Brown pavilion holds 150 seated or 250 for a standing/seated social function. As described above, such event planning is limited.



The new facility envisions many different configurations. Furnishings will allow for conference seating, small group discussions, large classroom presentations, or many other scenarios. Maximum theater-style seating will be approximately 100. Maximum standing/seated events with indoor/outdoor usage of the enclosed space, patios and courtyard will be 300 for a combined total of 550 with the Margaret Holmes Brown pavilion.

How does Hilltop relate to the university? I've given what I planned to Forever LSU. How is this different?

Our property is owned by the university, and a small portion of our operations is funded by the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture, but this amount comes nowhere close to covering the facility's operating costs. The Friends of Hilltop offers fee-based educational programs, community interest events, and plant sales throughout the year which allow us to raise funds for the salaries of our professional and clerical staff, and for all the projects which serve our mission and improve the ability of the property to serve visitors.

Because our mission is community-driven, we seek to have a broad impact on the citizens of the region, in communicating and demonstrating the value of using native plant species for sustainable urban living. Through a range of educational programs, we reach target audiences in the community, bringing the message of planting for a healthier future to an audience ranging from elementary school children to retirees. We serve as a bridge to translate the empirical knowledge often associated with university research, to the average home-owner. We attempt to instill the principles of land and nature stewardship in each of the audiences that we serve through our programs.

The site and the building serve as a valuable laboratory for faculty and students to explore the role and relationship between Louisiana native species and an urban built environment. The exposure of our broader audience to this university-based work enriches the experience of both our community clients, and the university students and faculty.

The LSU Hilltop Arboretum is an important part of LSU, but our reach goes far beyond LSU to the entire Baton Rouge and South Louisiana communities.

Why is LEED certification (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) so important?

An important focus of the programs offered by Friends of Hilltop is planting for environmental sustainability. Founder Emory Smith sought to share the value of using native plants both for their beauty and their low water usage and weather tolerance, and the Friends group has built upon his ethic. To complement that focus, Friends of Hilltop has become a member of the U.S. Green Building Council which offers LEED certification, the benchmark for environmental building design, construction and operation. Hilltop's commitment to sustainability should clearly extend beyond planting to include a whole living system approach. LEED incorporates five areas of development: water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and environmental quality. Achieving this rigorous and prestigious certification will allow us to provide an additional educational tool and serve as an example to the community.

What else will the new building provide?

With the addition of the enclosed facility, we will also build the outdoor courtyard that was part of the original plan. It will connect the open-air Margaret Holmes Brown pavilion to the new building and provide an important demonstration of best-practices for developing outdoor living space that extends the indoor space into the landscape, and works in concert with natural systems to utilize water and plant resources in a sustainable way. The courtyard will provide a more formal outdoor classroom space that can also function as a multi-purpose uncovered area for many kinds of events and receptions.



Why is an out-of-state architectural firm designing the pavilion?

We began the planning for the initial building complex with a selection process that included input from the College of Art & Design and the Friends of Hilltop. A national search was held and several short-listed architects were interviewed, including local firms. Based on Lake/Flato's commitment to sustainable building practices and design that celebrates the vernacular expression of its region, together with their experience in botanical garden structures, the committee felt that they were the superior firm for Hilltop's project. Our existing buildings have more than lived up to our expectations. They have received design awards, been featured in national publications, and continue to bring prominence to our quest for excellence. Lake/Flato had already completed the drawings for the enclosed facility as a part of their initial contract with us, so it was logical that we continue our association with this prestigious San Antonio architectural group, winner of the 2004 American Institute of Architects National Firm Award.

How will you handle the increase in parking needs that the facility will generate?

We have a master plan that will guide this development phase. Additional parking will be accommodated in the back section of the property and reached by a road extending from the existing lot along the southern property line, and screened from the neighborhood.

What other plans do you hope to accomplish in the near future?

Rehabilitation of Emory Smith Residence

The residence that Emory Smith constructed on the property for his family following World War II stands as a tangible artifact of Hilltop's founder's life spent shaping the Hilltop landscape. The house, through its humble design and materials (recycled lumber because of post-war shortages), communicates much about the man's basic simplicity and respect for the landscape. In order for the structure to survive and be used as an integral part of Hilltop's programs and experience, it needs to be stabilized and rehabilitated.

Caretaker residence

It was Emory's request that a representative of LSU live on the property to provide security for the site. In the past, landscape architecture graduate students have lived either in Emory's residence, or in trailers on the property. The house, while livable, requires ongoing maintenance; a trailer is not desirable since the 1999 up-grade of the arboretum with the addition of permanent structures by Lake/Flato. As security will be an increasingly critical issue with the new building and increased visitorship, a small apartment will need to be added to the site to house a caretaker. Solutions have ranged from an efficiency apartment that was included in Lake/Flato's original plans for the complex, but eliminated because of cost, to a national design competition for a LEED certified treehouse-type structure that might be constructed by students from the College of Art and Design.

Nursery/greenhouse/maintenance demonstration area

During his life at Hilltop, Emory Smith essentially operated a small commercial nursery on-site, and grew vegetables and fruit for family consumption, living from the land as much as possible. The Friends of Hilltop have operated a quasi-commercial nursery in recent years, but without the kinds of facilities that they need to support their volunteer efforts. The master plan calls for a working area, also located on the property perimeter that will include greenhouse(s), propagation and composting areas, and equipment storage. These additions will enhance Hilltop's ability to produce its own plant materials for use on the site, and will facilitate a broad range of experimental projects. This part of our site will eventually become an important demonstration project to test sustainable methods of operating garden support and maintenance spaces.