

# THOLOS

VOLUME 13

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U.S. Botanic Garden at 200: Deeply  
Rooted, Branching Outward

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## BY THE NUMBERS

Five Spring Gardening Tips

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## SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY

Capitol Building Self-Inspections



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## BEFORE & AFTER



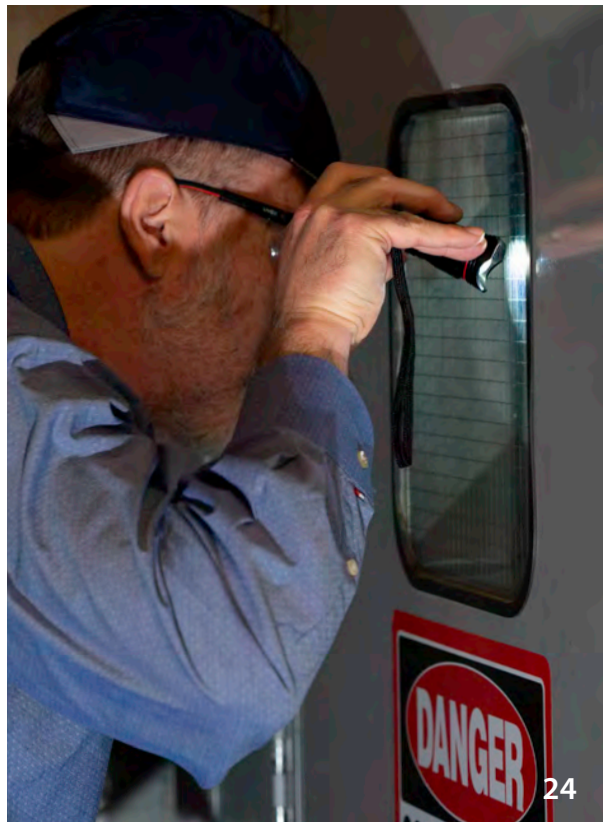
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DOING GOOD

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## CAPITOL VISITOR CENTER EMPLOYEES FIND WAYS TO GIVE

WRITTEN BY LAURA TRIVERS  
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY CHRISTINE BLACKERBY  
AND SUSAN SISK

The coronavirus inspired many of us to wonder what, if anything, we could do to help when it seemed the needs around us were overwhelming. Two Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) employees found a way and are using their skills to make a difference as our communities fight the virus.



### CHRISTINE BLACKERBY

Christine Blackerby, the CVC's exhibits curator, and her family are known for seeing a community need and finding a way to fill it. In 2016, they founded the Hyattsville Zombie Run, a 5K race that raises funds for a local school. And every October since, they have hosted this community effort, organizing more than 100 volunteers and welcoming 700 participants to raise more than \$20,000 each year.

When the coronavirus struck, many of Blackerby's neighbors in Hyattsville, Maryland, saw the need for at-risk people to wear fabric masks, and they began sewing. What wasn't clear though, was how

to get the masks from those with the capacity to sew to those with the highest need.

A neighbor asked Blackerby, her husband Kevin and several others to help figure out a way to connect the sewers to the people who needed masks. The result was the formation of a new organization — Route 1 Mask Match.

The group collects handmade fabric masks from neighborhood sewers and distributes them to health care workers, essential workers such as grocery store employees, and the elderly.

Blackerby's husband created the Route 1 Mask Match logo and the advertisements to recruit more sewers. The group then created a website, [Route1MaskMatch.org](http://Route1MaskMatch.org), with forms for requesting masks, offering sewn masks and donating sewing materials. The group's Facebook and Instagram pages offer tips on mask making with materials at hand. Elastic for ear bands has been in short supply, so most masks are made with cloth ties.

One volunteer posted on the Facebook page how to make the cloth ties more quickly using a small plastic tool; then he 3D-printed dozens of them to give to other sewers. Blackerby's porch is the drop-off and pickup point for the masks. "We collect the masks and package them for recipients with instructions on how to wash and wear them. More volunteers then deliver the masks, or let folks who have placed requests know to pick them up from our porch. We have provided masks to several local eldercare facilities and to essential workers at several local businesses," Blackerby explained.

"I'm not very good at sewing myself, so I'm very glad to have this way to help others during this crisis."



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## SUSAN SISK

As soon as Susan Sisk, CVC's director of e-commerce, finishes her telework each day, she commutes to her sewing room to begin her evening work — making cloth masks for her local hospital. "I began working with Holy Cross Hospital in Germantown after seeing a request for volunteers to make items for families with premature babies," Sisk said.

"The nursing staff asked for small items to give to new mothers with limited resources. They needed tiny gowns with space to cover medical equipment and take-home blankets that may be the only new item the mother has."

Recently the hospital staff reached out to Sisk for masks. "My nurse contact forwarded me a note a few weeks ago asking for masks. I had plenty of fabric scraps and was happy to help her. The project has been interesting, especially as the quarantine continued and more information came out. The nurses are very appreciative of the items and especially enjoy the fun and bright masks.

Sisk's mother "was amazing at sewing, knitting and crafts," and the two enjoy sharing their common interest. Sisk's recent contact with her mom, who lives in Ohio, has been limited to phone calls.



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**“THE NURSING STAFF ASKED FOR SMALL ITEMS TO GIVE TO NEW MOTHERS WITH LIMITED RESOURCES. THEY NEEDED TINY GOWNS WITH SPACE TO COVER MEDICAL EQUIPMENT...”**

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## “I AM PROUD THAT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SHOW MOM HOW THE SKILLS SHE GAVE ME HAVE BEEN PUT TO GOOD USE TO HELP OTHERS.”

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“Mom has been a great source for ideas, suggestions on techniques and motivation. I realize how much I appreciate the skills she taught my three brothers and me and the time she took with us growing up to share the things she loved to do. Working with the hospital has been great for both of us as we talk and share ideas.”

“I am proud that I have been able to show Mom how the skills she gave me have been put to good use to help others.”

Sisk continues to hone her mask pattern, responding to feedback from the nurses about fit and the need for a filter. “I recently found a pattern on YouTube with great reviews and a unique fit,” Sisk said. “The pattern and instructions were all in Thai, and it was challenging to overcome the language barrier.”

A family friend in the health industry wanted to learn to make masks for work and family. “We spent an evening social distancing at a big table, drafting a pattern from the site,” Sisk continued. “Then working from our separate homes, we made samples, adjusted them for a better fit, and added recommendations from other websites about how to better secure the mask and limit the need to touch it. We had sewing class over our phones.”

Sisk is now at work sewing up a new batch for the hospital and for friends and family. She also shared her new pattern with friends around the country, teaching sewing via text and FaceTime.











FEATURE

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## U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN AT 200: DEEPLY ROOTED, BRANCHING OUTWARD

WRITTEN BY DEVIN DOTSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS HATZENBUHLER  
HISTORICAL PHOTOS PROVIDED BY AOC PHOTO BRANCH

For 200 years, the United States Botanic Garden (USBG) has been showcasing plants to visitors from around the globe. The USBG was originally proposed by George Washington to establish a place for Americans to learn about useful and engaging plants. Today, the USBG welcomes over a million visitors annually. Two hundred years after its creation, the Garden is alive year-round with exhibits and programs that focus on education, accessibility, conservation, collaborative partnerships, and world-class horticulture and sustainable gardening.

**Left: This 1873 photograph shows how the USBG's first Conservatory had grown from a single Victorian greenhouse to this large, five-part Conservatory with 14 support greenhouses**

# “AS WE CELEBRATE 200 YEARS OF HISTORY AT THE U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN, I AM EXCITED TO EXPLORE NEW WAYS OF HELPING PEOPLE MAKE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS TO PLANTS.”

“As we celebrate 200 years of history at the U.S. Botanic Garden, I am excited to explore new ways of helping people make meaningful connections to plants,” said Saharah Moon Chapotin, executive director. “Whether it’s to spend a quiet moment in our beautiful Conservatory and gardens, to discover the tastes and textures of new food plants, or to learn about how plants contribute to a more sustainable planet, I want every visitor to the Garden to feel welcome here and to come away with a greater appreciation for the natural world.”

## DEEPLY ROOTED HISTORY

George Washington and Thomas Jefferson weren’t just political leaders, they were also farmers. They understood that a botanic garden could serve as both an educational resource and a source of national pride. On May 8, 1820, over 20 years after George Washington suggested a location for the botanic garden within Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s plans for the fledging capital city, President James Madison signed a bill granting the garden 5 acres of land at the base of the U.S. Capitol.

Run by the Columbian Institute for the Promotion of Arts and Sciences, the USBG grew ornamental and useful (food and medicinal) plants for 17 years. Funding ran out, but the idea of a national garden didn’t stay dormant long. In 1842, Congress revitalized the USBG to care for hundreds of plants gathered by the U.S. Exploring Expedition on its four-year, round-the-world journey. A Victorian Conservatory opened to the public in 1850; the USBG has been publicly accessible since then.



1874 illustration from D.C. visitor guide



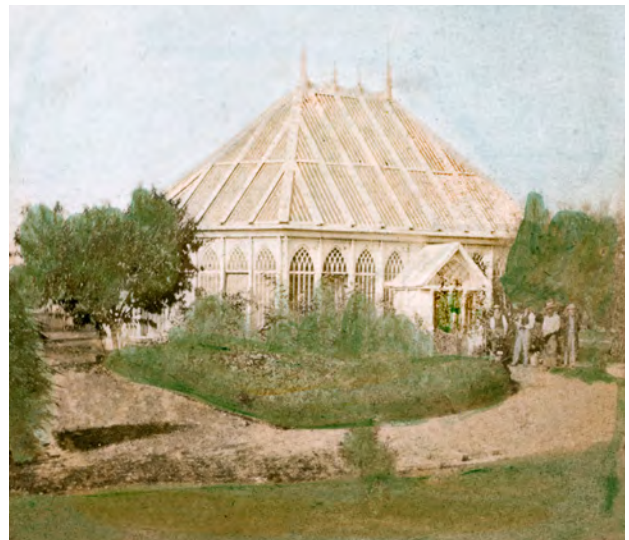
## GROWING IN SIZE AND POPULARITY

The USBG continued to grow during the latter half of the 19th century. The Victorian Conservatory was expanded in 1867 — adding a five-part, 300-foot long conservatory with a central dome and two wings and 14 greenhouses, one of which was used as a botanical classroom. And, on Frederick Law Olmsted's recommendation, Congress purchased the 30-foot high, cast-iron sculptural Fountain of Light and Water created by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi for America's 1876 centennial exposition. The fountain, installed at the USBG in 1877 was a popular gathering spot late in the century.

An early 20th-century decision to enact L'Enfant's original vision of a National Mall west of the U.S. Capitol meant the USBG had to move. A new Conservatory, built across the street to the south, opened in 1933. The new 30,000-square-foot facility, still in use today, was the largest aluminum building in the United States at the time of construction. Since 1934, the USBG has been administered through the Architect of the Capitol.

The 1980s and 1990s saw further expansions to the USBG. After congressional spouses spearheaded an effort to create a rose garden on Capitol Hill in the 1980s, a nonprofit National Fund for the U.S. Botanic Garden was formed. Their national design competition yielded a vision that grew beyond roses, leading to the new National Garden with its amphitheater; regional, rose and pollinator gardens; and the First Ladies Water Garden.

In 1997, the year the U.S. Mint issued a commemorative U.S. Botanic Garden silver dollar, the Conservatory underwent a renovation that necessitated the relocation of the 3,000 plants. Large palms were transported to Florida and plants deemed too large to move, like the historic 1842 cycads in the Garden Court, had cuttings taken for propagation.



**Top: U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory and employees, circa 1856**  
**Middle: Visitors in the Palm Promenade, circa 1890**  
**Bottom: Palm House portion of the USBG Conservatory, circa 1917**



On December 11, 2001, after four years, the Conservatory, renovated with modernized systems, reopened to welcome visitors.

## EXPANDING SCIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

“One of my goals is to increase the amount of scientific research at the Garden,” Chapotin said. “Over the last few decades, the Garden has supported several national and international science and conservation projects, but there is room for more direct research and conservation work to be done by visiting scientists and our own employees.”

The USBG cofounded the North American Orchid Conservation Center along with the Smithsonian Institution in 2011. Today, the Garden is involved in research on the interconnection between orchids and mycorrhizal fungi and will soon grow research plants as part of its orchid collection.



Visitors explore the Orchid house



Employees plant the new green roof at the U.S. Botanic Garden - October 2019



A 2017 trip to the Philippines restarted USBG plant exploration, which continues domestically and internationally. “The goal is to increase representation of wild-collected plants at the Garden to improve the conservation value of our collection,” said Jim Adams, horticulture manager. “The Garden’s major collections of orchids, American native plants, desert plants and economic plants will all receive a boost from such work.”

In 2019, the USBG installed more than 29,000 plants to create a 5,000-square-foot green roof atop the stone portion of the Conservatory. The green roof, a research project planted with traditional sedum and native plants (mostly grasses), compares stormwater retention by the different plantings.

Finally, the USBG fosters plant sciences by making its collections and facilities available to visiting scholars and by helping to train horticulturalists, botanists and educators. The USBG plans to expand its internship program and facilitate collaborative research on its collections.

Given its metropolitan location and national presence, the USBG has an important role in evaluating, demonstrating and disseminating information on urban sustainability. In addition to the green roof, the USBG plans to establish a demonstration urban farm and showcase rain gardens, native plants and pollinator-friendly horticulture.



# “THE GOAL IS TO INCREASE REPRESENTATION OF WILD-COLLECTED PLANTS AT THE GARDEN TO IMPROVE THE CONSERVATION VALUE OF OUR COLLECTION.”

## EDUCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

“We want to continue the Garden’s legacy of showcasing a wide variety of useful plants and to expand our work in keeping the planet healthy for the next generation,” said Susan Pell, deputy executive director. “We look forward to welcoming visitors from diverse communities across the United States and around the world as we begin the next 200 years of plant exploration and discovery.”

The USBG offered over 2,600 broad, inclusive and educational programs in 2019, engaging more than 102,300 participants. Events included dance performances, community art workshops and interactive programs on cultural use of plants for food, beauty products and medicine. The USBG’s inclusive programming includes expedited entry, early morning and evening visits for individuals with cognitive or sensory processing

**Left: The 93-foot-tall Tropics house in the Conservatory showcases tropical plants from around the world**



A volunteer shares the story of cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) with young visitors

disabilities, monthly programs that highlight plant connections for individuals with dementia, and tactile tours designed for individuals who are blind or have low vision. Other on-site resources include sensory bags with fidgets, noise-reducing headphones and weighted lap blankets. As part of this work, the USBG is conducting a visitor study to learn who visits the Garden and who does not. The results will support programs designed to serve broader community needs.

The USBG continues to expand its training and exhibitions. Over the past two years, the USBG has offered

urban agriculture career training programs for veterans in partnership with the National Center for Appropriate Technology and train-the-trainer programs for professionals with the Chicago Botanic Garden. A new USBG 2020 exhibit in the Kitchen Garden is a collaboration with George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. This yearlong display celebrates the historic connection between the USBG and these Founding Fathers by showcasing plants and interpretive stories from the two estates.



## DEEPLY ROOTED, BRANCHING OUTWARD

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Building from an idea proposed by George Washington, the USBG has grown to impact the public garden, education and conservation communities through initiatives and partnerships like the Sustainable SITES Initiative™, the North American Orchid Conservation Center, Morning at the Garden, Project BudBurst, the

Mid-Atlantic Regional seed bank, and multiple conservation assessments through Botanic Gardens Conservation International. The USBG continues a legacy two centuries strong to fulfill its original mission of connecting people and plants.



Rose Garden at the U.S. Botanic Garden

BY THE NUMBERS

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## FIVE SPRING GARDENING TIPS

Spring has arrived! Our expert gardeners shared a few tips to help ensure success as you prepare your gardens for spring and beyond.

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1

**SURVEY THE LANDSCAPE REGULARLY:** Pest populations respond to seasonal changes. As the weather warms, pests are more active and search for shelter, food, water and breeding sites. Frequent monitoring allows you to quickly identify and respond to damage-causing pests.

2

**TEST YOUR GARDEN SOIL:** Testing is recommended every three to five years to see what nutrients or organic materials soil needs or has too much of. For example, if you learn that your soil is high in phosphorus, avoid phosphorus-heavy fertilizers. Or, if you discover your soil is naturally alkaline, add aluminum sulfate to support evergreens and acid-loving shrubs like hydrangeas.

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3

**WATER DEEP AND EARLY:** Since warmer temperatures aid evaporation, lawns should be watered in the early morning and long enough to soak 6-inches deep, then allowed to dry during the day. Deep watering is successful if a screwdriver blade can easily penetrate to a depth of 6 inches.

4

**PRUNE, PRUNE, PRUNE:** Vegetation that survives the winter needs to be pruned. Older and diseased shoots should be pruned while dormant in the winter or early spring. You can prevent the spread of fungal particles by disposing of damaged and diseased foliage.

5

**TIME TO SPRUCE THINGS UP:** In addition to fertilizers and organic materials you may add to your gardens, think about adding mulch to your flower beds and gardens. One to 3 inches of mulch helps prevent weeds and diseases. It also keeps the moisture in the garden and maintains the soil temperature.

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**Top: Gardener Dustin Pfeiffer drills holes to prepare for planting flowers**

**Middle: Gardener Theresa Hofmeister plants seasonal summer annuals and perennials**

**Bottom: Gardener Assistant Supervisor MJ Bardwell string trims around trees and in areas mowers must avoid getting too close to**







The finished SR-253 hearing room, with the ceiling and plaster reliefs repainted to appear like carved stone, which is truer to the architects' original intention.





BEFORE & AFTER

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## HEARING ROOM RENOVATION FOR THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH YODER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS HATZENBUHLER

The Senate Office Buildings jurisdiction recently completed a project to restore the hearing room for the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation (SR-253) in the Russell Senate Office Building.

The renovation required exceptional effort and cross-jurisdictional teamwork to transform the space into a state-of-the-art hearing room while simultaneously restoring its original architectural intent. This effort, which furthers the Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) strategic goals of creating awe-inspiring facilities and providing extraordinary service, has resulted in major improvements to a key room in the Senate buildings. The project is also serving as a pilot for an extensive hearing room renovation program planned in the Senate buildings over the next 15 years.

The renovation project prioritized historic preservation and revitalized the Beaux Arts interior envisioned by Carrère and Hastings, the renowned architectural firm who designed the building in the early 20th century. The project team completed a comprehensive historic paint analysis and researched primary archival sources to restore the room to its period of significance, which was determined to be when the fourth wing was added to the Russell Building.

The hearing room renovation also features several other important upgrades:

**An expanded, custom-made wood rostrum and dais** rotated 90 degrees to accommodate the larger number of committee members

**Advanced multimedia technology**, including 14-inch monitors, touch-screen control panels and microphones integrated directly into the dais for each member, and camera equipment concealed by wooden bookcases when not in use

**State-of-the-art lighting**, with advanced LED technology designed to reduce glare, improve recorded image quality, require far less manipulation for hearings and other special events, and generate less heat

**Advanced HVAC systems**, with rerouted ductwork for optimized temperature control and air flow

**Improved ADA-accessibility**, bringing the hearing room into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and providing critical accommodations for senators, congressional staff and visitors with special needs

**Custom furnishings**, including a 14-foot witness table, a faux fireplace hearth and a wooden door with split-top rail to maintain the room's historic appearance while incorporating needed infrastructure upgrades

**Custom carpeting, drapery treatments and bronze handrails**, with the carpet design inspired by the diamond pattern in the historic marble flooring underneath and ornate draperies paired with black-out roller shades to better control incoming light

**Reduced energy use and substantial cost savings** from key lighting and HVAC system upgrades

**Exceptional craftsmanship, teamwork and collaboration** throughout the project



**Left: The initial stage of the hearing room renovation, which shows the previous color scheme and the new custom wood dais that has been expanded and rotated 90 degrees to accommodate a larger number of committee members.**

**Right: Matt Flechner, woodcrafter leader with the Senate Woodcrafting Branch, installs a 14-inch monitor, microphone and touchscreen control panel for each senator into the dais, making sure the equipment doesn't impair the sight line of committee members during hearings.**





**Top left: Quincy Biggs, painting worker with the Senate Painting Branch, paints the anteroom's new wall, which was added to conceal upgraded lighting controls and audiovisual equipment.**

**Top Right: Scott Johnson, an electrician with the Senate Electrical Branch, installs new cabling in the in-floor raceway, the trough for essential electrical, IT and audiovisual infrastructure running below the hearing room floor.**

**Middle right: Warren Campbell, a mason with the Senate Masonry Branch, sets marble tile in the renovated ADA-compliant restroom, with the tile selected to match the standard of the Russell Building restrooms.**

**Bottom: The finished hearing room features a three-legged custom wooden witness table (center), which was specially designed without legs on one side to provide an extended span to accommodate several witnesses. The custom carpeting was also inspired by the diamond pattern in the room's historic marble flooring.**



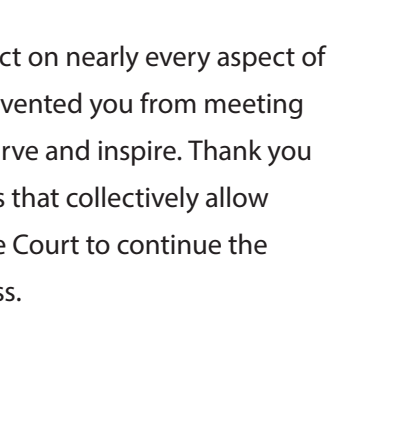
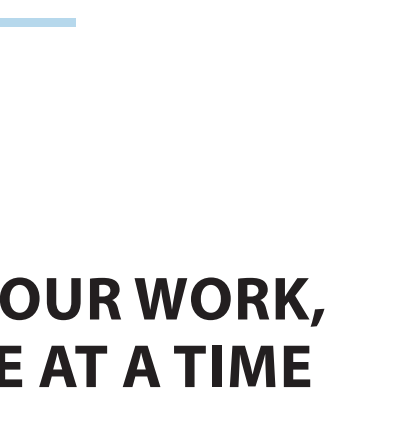


EMPLOYEE HIGHLIGHTS

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**SHARING YOUR WORK,  
ONE SELFIE AT A TIME**

COVID-19 has had an impact on nearly every aspect of our lives, but it has not prevented you from meeting our mission to serve, preserve and inspire. Thank you for sharing these moments that collectively allow Congress and the Supreme Court to continue the nation's democratic process.













SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY

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# CAPITOL BUILDING SELF-INSPECTIONS

WRITTEN BY ERIN NELSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEWITT ROSEBOROUGH

Given the impact COVID-19 is having on us all, safety is at the top of most minds these days. Things we used to take for granted like going to the movies, ballpark or grocery store are either nonexistent or take more planning than we're used to.

Things are no different for the Architect of the Capitol (AOC). We have adapted to this new environment and continue to evaluate how best to keep our employees safe. While many things have changed in recent weeks, our commitment to safety was present long before our vocabulary expanded to include words like coronavirus, COVID-19 or social distancing.



**Capitol Building Assistant Superintendent John Deubler documents OSHA violations for abatement during a self-inspection**

One of the important ways we're advancing our safety efforts is through self-inspections, which are part of the agency's Strategic Plan. They are a way for jurisdictions to self-identify and self-correct risks to ensure a safe and environmentally compliant work area. Some of those risks include hazards such as electrical issues. Self-inspections offer a chance to check the fire extinguishers, ladders, tools, egresses and other housekeeping items. The inspections also allow the safety specialists to interact with employees to answer questions or address concerns they might have and provide on-the-spot training if necessary.

The Capitol Building jurisdiction is pioneering the self-inspection effort and has taken the opportunity to involve its leaders including Superintendent Mark Reed, Deputy Superintendent Jason McIntyre and Assistant Superintendent John Deubler. As Reed explains, his leadership team made the decision to perform the self-inspections for two main reasons, "First, we want to see for ourselves what types of safety violations exist. Second, completing the self-inspections allows us to experience what we are asking our employees to do. Too often, we assign tasks without understanding the true impact. This affords the opportunity to understand



what effort and resources are required to inspect the building, identify safety violations and abate the issues. It also reinforces the importance of safety.”

Safety, Fire and Environmental Programs (SFEP) designed and manages the tool used to track the jurisdiction’s inspection findings and has been pleased with the impacts of the self-inspections.

“Safety is one of our core values, and inspections are an important way for the AOC to ensure a safe environment for all who work in or visit the Capitol complex and AOC-managed facilities. When Mr. Reed, Mr. McIntyre and Mr. Deubler personally perform inspections and

assure the findings are corrected, it shows the value they place on creating a safe workplace. Leaders set the example, and I’m excited about the work they are doing in this area,” said SFEP Director Pat Williams.

McIntyre agrees, “The best benefit of the self-inspection program is that it is an avenue for our jurisdiction to improve the safety of the work environment for the men and women maintaining the U.S. Capitol. When our shop employees see our front office taking a personal interest in their safety, my goal is that it will empower them to take the same approach and identify safety improvements to help protect their fellow workers.”



John Deubler and Safety Manager Brent Dittman discuss permit requirements



Before COVID-19 upended many of our schedules, we tagged along on a self-inspection with the Capitol Building's Safety and Occupational Health Manager Brent Dittman, Safety and Occupational Health Specialist Gerardo Figueroa and Deubler.

## THE PRIMARY GOAL

## IS TO PROTECT THE

## U.S. CAPITOL FOR

## FUTURE GENERATIONS

For Deubler, the primary goal is to protect the U.S. Capitol for future generations. "I am just one in a long line of AOC employees who have taken care of the building since 1793, and I want to make sure it is around for many years to come. Part of protecting the Capitol is trying to eliminate all safety hazards that can potentially injure our staff or other occupants or can damage the building," he said.

Deubler regularly attends project meetings to stay informed about what staff are working on, but that isn't the same as seeing it firsthand. "Getting out in the field lets me see the high quality of the work. I am always impressed with the standard of care the AOC employees show for the Capitol Building."

One could argue that same standard of care has been around for centuries.



**Top: John Deubler inspects the ceiling of a mechanical space**

**Bottom: (left to right) Gerardo Figueroa, John Deubler and Brent Dittman are part of the Capitol Building team that performs monthly self-inspections**



As we followed the team through the mechanical space scheduled for that day's inspection, Figueroa described the elements in the room and the efforts it has taken to transform it into what it is today. "This is a unique, one-of-a-kind building. It has gone from having no electricity to a system of pulleys and levers to modern-day HVAC and electrical systems — several of which involved transforming small, cramped spaces. What we have accomplished collectively over the generations is impressive."

And thanks to the efforts of the Capitol Building team, the improvements continue.

The self-inspections are scheduled about once a month with two of the Capitol's superintendents, while Dittman and Figueroa perform inspections daily. "Whether it be shop inspections with supervisors or while we're just walking down the hall, the goal is always the same — increasing the safety of employees," said Dittman.

And for McIntyre that is the ultimate goal, "Safety of our employees is my highest priority. As a newer employee to the Capitol Building jurisdiction, this program allows me to put a fresh set of eyes on spaces our staff have been working in for many years. Eliminating a potential shock or fall hazard is important work — everyone goes home safe and we can continue to serve Congress and preserve the U.S. Capitol."

**Inspections are a daily part of life for the Capitol Building's safety and occupational health team. They're responsible for the care of about 1.5 million square feet — including the U.S. Capitol and Capitol Visitor Center.**

## U.S. Capitol & CVC



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## 12.34 Nationals Parks



BEYOND THE DOME

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## A VISIT TO THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF THE BUILDING ARTS

WRITTEN BY KATE HOLDER  
PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY HCMD

*SERVE*  
*PRESERVE*  
*INSPIRE*

The Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) mission cannot be fulfilled without its employees possessing the skills required to meet the AOC's deep commitment to maintaining the historic buildings of Capitol Hill.

As such, the AOC relies on a workforce that is approximately 70 percent skilled tradespeople, a class of workers including masons, plasterers and woodworkers that have been in short supply in the labor market for the past several years. For every three skilled tradespeople retiring in America today, only one new worker is taking their place.



"We're trying to attract our workforce of tomorrow while retaining our workforce of today," said the AOC's Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer John McPhaul. "That's how we'll ensure the transfer of knowledge and expertise in maintaining the historic buildings entrusted to our care." The AOC's Human Capital Management Division (HCMD) has been working intensely to create new recruitment efforts and identify new sources of skilled tradespeople.

Last fall, hopes were raised for establishing a new, long-term source of skilled labor when AOC staff members from HCMD and the Library Buildings and Grounds jurisdiction spent a day touring the American College of the Building Arts (ACBA) in Charleston, South Carolina.

"WE'RE TRYING TO  
ATTRACT OUR  
WORKFORCE OF  
TOMORROW WHILE  
RETAINING OUR  
WORKFORCE OF TODAY."



The AOC team at the ACBA (left to right): Mike Miller, John McPhaul and Marvin Cortez

“We’re hoping to establish a partnership with the college that allows us to build a talent pipeline for AOC positions that are considered hard to fill,” said McPhaul, who was accompanied on the trip by HCMD Chief of Talent Acquisition and Classification Marvin Cortez and Library Buildings and Grounds Mason Supervisor Mike Miller.

ACBA offers a unique liberal arts education that also trains artisans in the traditional building arts. The college was established in 1999, 10 years after Category 4 Hurricane Hugo devastated the coastal Carolina region and damaged more than 80 percent of Charleston’s historic structures. The lack of skilled workers there delayed rebuilding efforts for years.

In 2004, ACBA began offering a Bachelor of Applied Science degree in building arts, making it the only four-year school in the country dedicated to traditional trades. The academic program offers craft specialization in seven disciplines: architectural carpentry, architectural stone, classical architecture, forged architectural ironwork, masonry, plasterwork and timber framing. The college also offers a two-year Associate of Applied Science degree.

During their visit to the school, McPhaul, Cortez and Miller were hosted by ACBA’s chief academic officer and chief financial officer; they also met briefly with ACBA President Lt. General Colby M. Broadwater III. After touring offices and student workshops, the AOC delegation presented an overview of AOC career opportunities during two one-hour sessions that were each attended by around 50 students.

As the AOC’s subject matter expert, Miller observed students at work in the college’s shops and talked to them about what they were learning as well as what one could expect from an AOC job. “I think their



**Top: An ACBA woodcrafting workshop**

**Bottom: Mike Miller (left) talks with ACBA Chief Academic Officer Wade Razzi**



# “THEY’RE MATURE, THEY’RE LEARNING THE RIGHT SKILLS AND THEY ALSO KNOW COMPUTER APPLICATIONS, WHICH YOU HAVE TO HAVE IN THE TRADES TODAY.”

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students would be great assets for us,” said Miller. “They’re mature, they’re learning the right skills and they also know computer applications, which you have to have in the trades today.”

Miller, who’s worked at the AOC for over 30 years, helped impress upon ACBA students the advantages of working at the AOC as opposed to short-term construction jobs. “I told them, here you have year-round work, you’re treated like a real person, safety always comes first, and the benefits can’t be beat,” Miller said. “I think I opened some eyes, especially about the benefits and the chance to move up.”

The AOC offers “career ladder” promotional opportunities in most jobs including skilled trades, where workers can advance from a helper position to journey level all the way up to a supervisory position. “It’s a critical part of our worker retention efforts,” McPhaul said.

Prospects for a fruitful partnership with ACBA appear promising. “We are hoping to establish some new internship positions within our existing summer intern program that helps fulfill ACBA student requirements to

do ‘externships’ as part of their studies,” McPhaul said. The AOC program would create three new intern positions: masonry aide, woodcrafter aide and plasterer work aide.

As a start, three ACBA students have been scheduled to participate in the AOC’s 2020 Summer Intern Program. As this goes to print, however, it’s uncertain as to when this year’s program will begin given COVID-19 safety concerns.

“We’re also looking at training exchange opportunities,” Cortez said, “where we would send our artisans down to ACBA to learn some of the techniques taught by the college and then bring that knowledge back to the AOC to help train our people.”

It would be a natural fit. The two organizations strive to foster a workforce dedicated to craftsmanship and historic preservation in service of the architectural heritage of our country and beyond.

Serve, preserve and inspire — it’s the ethos behind the AOC’s drive to recruit and nurture a skilled workforce now and in the future.

## **THANK YOU FROM THE CONGRESSIONAL COMMUNITY**

The Architect of the Capitol has received many letters, emails and calls expressing gratitude from the congressional community for your work throughout this pandemic. Without you, the work of Congress and the Supreme Court could not continue. You have made it possible for the buildings to remain open and for the work of Congress to carry on. We want you to know that your efforts have not gone unnoticed. We are grateful for your dedication to the AOC and our nation. Here's a recap of the thank yous we have received.





## LETTERS

Dear Mr. Blanton,

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the teams that make up the workforce of the Architect of the Capitol. The challenging days the country finds itself in have been an exceptional challenge for everyone that has both the honor and responsibility of working for this institution. The Architect's office in particular has a unique mission and continues to execute that with excellence every day.

While we may not know every task each person performs, on behalf of a grateful Senate please accept my thanks and admiration for the work you continue to do each day to keep our Capitol and its buildings operating at a high level.

Sincerely,

Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader





Dear Colleagues of the Architect of the Capitol,

I want to express my immense gratitude for your hard work and dedication under the most challenging of circumstances. As most Americans remain quarantined in the safety of their own homes, many of you leave your families each day to come to the Capitol campus. I know that doing so is not easy, but the essential work you perform allows Congress to provide much needed assistance to the American people. Put simply, the dedication and skill shown by both the staff present on campus and those working off-site are an inspiration.

I am particularly grateful for the herculean effort it took to prepare the Capitol and House Chamber for the March 27th vote on the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Although we still have much more work to do, the programs authorized by that law are providing much needed relief to American workers, families, businesses and health-care systems. This relief would not be available to the American people without your work.

I look forward to eventually being able to return to business as usual. Until then, please stay safe and healthy, and know that Members of Congress from across the country are deeply appreciative of all that you do. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Zoe Lofgren  
Chairperson  
Committee on House Administration



**EXCERPTS FROM A THANK YOU VIDEO CREATED BY MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**

*"I just want to thank everybody on the Hill, whether it's the Architect of the Capitol people, whether it's the House Administration, House physician, Capitol Police, for everything you're doing to keep us safe and also to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Know that we appreciate you, we thank you and we pray for you every day. So God bless. Thank you and we look forward to seeing you when we get back."*

Congressman Denver Riggleman

*"I wanted to say thanks to all the folks that enable us to do our jobs in a safe, healthy and secure way. I'm talking about the Capitol Police, the Sergeant at Arms, the Architect of the Capitol, Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, the Attending Physician and everybody at the Office of Employee Assistance. Y'all are awesome, and I just want to say thanks for protecting us from COVID-19 and allowing us here in Congress to keep working on behalf of the American people."*

Congressman Will Hurd

*"I want to thank everyone on Capitol Hill from our police to our cleaning staff to the Architect of the Capitol for doing such a great job of maintaining the Capitol, keeping it safe, keeping it clean, making sure it's a safe working environment. We can't thank you enough, so a big shout-out to everyone."*

Congressman Bob Latta

Mullin thanked *"all of our vital employees that are still at the nation's capital making sure that members still have access and we have the vital resources we need, from the Capitol Police that are constantly keeping us safe, the Sergeant at Arms that's out there giving us information daily, our attending physicians that are taking care of all the members and the staff that's on the Hill. From our staff that is manning our offices and getting those resources to us to the Capitol Architect and the whole maintenance crew that's making sure that we're not spreading the coronavirus among ourselves and taking it home to our families. I just want to say thank you. Thank you for the work that you're doing. May God bless you and may God bless the United States of America."*

Congressman Markwayne Mullin





*"Hey everyone that's still on campus in Washington, D.C. I know you're working hard. I know this is a trying time. We're in an unprecedented moment in our nation's history fighting this virus, and I know that virus has come to Capitol Hill. Every one of you have worked very hard to give us the best response possible. I really want to thank everyone, including Chief Administrative Officer Phil Kiko and his entire team who are working hard to make sure that our House operations remain viable while almost every office teleworks. I want to thank the United States Capitol Police for securing the Capitol and the complex in dealing with the many issues that their officers and personnel face every day. Brett Blanton, the Architect of the Capitol brand new on the job – you couldn't have asked for a crazier time to join the team. Great job. Great work. Please give my thanks to all the AOC employees."*

Congressman Rodney Davis

## TWEETS

*"I'm proud to have helped secure \$25 million for @uscapitol to ensure Congress can conduct the people's business and ensure a strong national response to the coronavirus pandemic. Yesterday, I heard from AOC Brett Blanton about his office's response efforts."*

Congressman Mike Quigley

*"I was pleased to hear from @uscapitol Brett Blanton today about how Congressional-appropriated funds are helping the AOC keep the Capitol safe and clean and ensure payment for furloughed employees during the coronavirus pandemic."*

Congresswoman Lois Frankel

*"Thank you to employees within @uscapitol and the House for helping us vote today on necessary assistance for the American people while keeping us and staff safe!"*

House Admin Committee GOP





Communications and Congressional Relations  
U.S. Capitol, Room SB-16  
Washington, DC 20515

## Tholos Spring 2020

The Architect of the Capitol strives to meet its mission 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to **serve** Congress and the Supreme Court, **preserve** America's Capitol, and **inspire** memorable experiences for all who visit the buildings and grounds.

*Tholos* is distributed by the Architect of the Capitol primarily for AOC employees. Questions regarding content and publication should be directed to AOC Communications and Congressional Relations at [communications@aoc.gov](mailto:communications@aoc.gov), 202.228.1793, or U.S. Capitol, Room SB-16, Washington, DC 20515.

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Thomas Hatzenbuehler

