

NEWS RELEASE

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Adkins Arboretum Receives Program Excellence Award from American Public Gardens Association

Adkins Arboretum's [Rooted Wisdom: Nature's Role in the Underground Railroad](#), an interpretive storytelling program that explores how self-liberators used knowledge of the natural landscape to forge a path to freedom, received the coveted Program Excellence Award at the American Public Gardens Association (AGPA) 2023 Conference held June 5–8 in Fort Worth, Texas.



The conference is presented by the United States Forest Service Department of Agriculture, the Dallas Arboretum & Botanical Garden and the Fort Worth Botanical Garden. More than 200 public gardens from nearly all 50 states are represented at the conference.

Adkins Arboretum Executive Director Ginna Tiernan (center) accepts the American Public Gardens Association Program Excellence Award from Awards Committee co-chair Tracy Qiu (left) and APGA CEO Michelle Provaznik at the APGA annual conference held earlier this month in Fort Worth, Texas.

Launched in 2022, the *Rooted Wisdom* guided experience sheds light on freedom seekers' deep understanding of nature and how this knowledge informed their methods for navigation, concealment, finding food and evading capture. Visitors to rootedwisdom.org are invited to watch a five-part film series and then take a deeper dive into the lives of freedom seekers introduced in the film—through contextual information, related historical sites, narrative accounts and resources that examine the landscape both then and now.

With support from the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, the Arboretum partnered with Schoolhouse Farmhouse Studio and Underground Railroad historian Anthony Cohen of the Menare Foundation to advance previously developed programming and take a fresh look at presenting interpretation and educational outreach in a public garden setting. The documentary film, produced by Schoolhouse Farmhouse and featuring Cohen as historian and narrator, is combined with a virtual tour and experiential history to present historical accounts through a modern landscape and invite visitors to connect to this history, explore how the landscape has shaped us and consider how we will shape the future. The program amplifies an underrepresented story in our collective past and creates spaces to reevaluate how we use public gardens and outdoor spaces today.

“It is a great honor to receive this award on behalf of Adkins Arboretum, our consultants Schoolhouse Farmhouse, our longtime friend and consultant Anthony Cohen and all those who contributed,” said Arboretum Executive Director Ginna Tiernan. “We are proud to present this program in all its forms and will continue to build on it with a new audio tour recently funded by the Maryland Heritage Area Authority.”

The *Rooted Wisdom* guided experience is both a keystone project and a roadmap for additional programming that includes interpretation, formal and informal education, adult learning through in-person tours, community partnership and collaboration and an audio essay released in March 2023 featuring Cohen and filmmaker Mecca Lewis. Support in 2022 from the Fryling Fund through the Mid-Shore Community Foundation will provide a *Rooted Wisdom* field trip for middle school students in Talbot and Queen Anne’s counties’ public schools. The students will attend a screening and discussion with Cohen at the Avalon Theatre, followed by a field trip to the Arboretum for a hands-on experience. The program also serves as a model for other public gardens and horticultural institutions looking to engage their sites’ comprehensive history and become more inclusive.

APGA’s Program Excellence Award is presented to an institutional member who has displayed an engaged and innovative spirit in the development and facilitation of an original and completed public program. Programs can be within one or more disciplines appropriate to horticultural institutions, including education and outreach, conservation, development, botany, gardening, horticulture, research, extension or administration.

Located in Caroline County at the headwaters of Tuckahoe Creek, the Arboretum is one of the few botanical institutions focused on conserving and promoting native flora of the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain. As a significant natural, educational and cultural resource, it is a model for land conservation and strives to provide exceptional experiences in nature while inspiring environmental stewardship, offering respite and healing and celebrating natural and cultural diversity through the joy and wonder of the natural world. For more information about the *Rooted Wisdom* initiative, visit adkinsarboretum.org or contact the Arboretum at 410-634-2847 or info@adkinsarboretum.org.

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