

Rediscovering the Dawes Arboretum Discovery Center  
2019 NAI Region 4 Interpretive Project Grant

The Dawes Arboretum is grateful to the National Association for Interpretation Region 4 for the receipt of a 2019 Interpretive Project Grant. Although we have 2,000 acres on which to connect with our visitors, many are drawn to our Visitors Center (for restrooms, of course!) but also as a respite from the weather and an opportunity to observe reptiles and birds, to learn about our history, to engage with our staff and to engage with books and interactive exhibits.

The Visitors Center was built in the 1960's, with an addition in 1980. The main level of the Visitors Center houses a gift shop and administrative offices, while the lower level houses more offices and the Discovery Center.

Abigail Wilson, Director of Education at the Dawes Arboretum, reached out to a fellow board member of the Columbus Historical Society, John Luchin of Classic Interactions. With matching funds from the Arboretum, John was hired as a consultant to produce layouts, elevations and a signage style guide for the Arboretum's Discovery Center.

The main access to the lower level Discovery Center is through a dark stairway directly from the foyer of the building. It has always been a challenge to get visitors to see the stairs and recognize that they lead to a public area. Large vinyl clings for that entry door were created, so that whether the door was open or closed, visitors would know where it led. A neutral paint color had been used throughout the building. To delineate the private offices from the public Discovery Center, staff and volunteers painted the Center's walls bright green and blue. Visitors were able to witness the color change last winter. My office is near the base of the stairs. I heard visitors and staff "ooh and ahh" at the fun transformation. Some visitors who had been coming to the Arboretum for years came to the Discovery Center for the first time.

John led the education staff in the purchase of materials and in training so that we could mount cohesive, professional-looking signs and posters using foam core, adhesive and an in-house banner printer. Our facilities staff mounted a TV monitor for digital displays.

Our building has been closed to the public since the pandemic began in March. The education team changes exhibits seasonally. Although we do not yet know in which season we can reopen, we have begun to rearrange exhibit cases with our new vision. Although we highly value our opportunities to engage with visitors outdoors, we will be excited to place the final touches on our Discovery Center and engage indoors with our visitors once again.

Grant monies used:

- \$537.24  
for signage: custom-designed vinyl clings as well as mounting board, cutting tools and adhesive for signage designed and printed in-house
- \$137.07  
for green and blue wall paint to add color cohesiveness and imagination
- \$325.69  
Toward the Classic Interaction's \$3,500 exhibit design fee