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Bradley Gottfried

Planting with purpose: second campus Dean roots campus to community

by Monica M. Walk

Native grasses bend and tree leaves rustle in the breeze. Coneflowers, black-eyed susans and other summer wildflowers paint the fields in purples, golds and greens. A picture-perfect prairie thrives on the UW-Fond du Lac campus.

This is no mere landscape, but planting with purpose: a recapturing of local terrain once lost to settlement and now again available for study and appreciation.

Turning acres of lawn back to original prairie took root under the leadership of Bradley Gottfried, Ph.D., the second campus dean, whose tenure spanned 1987-1993. A biologist by training, Gottfried felt concern about the amount of campus land being mowed, recalling how one employee would be dedicated to this task for an entire summer.

More importantly, local interest in creating a [prairie-style arboretum](#) on the campus land -- previously celebrated as a lush and wild hunting ground -- already existed.

"It's not so much what I did, but the people who embraced an ideal and vision," said Gottfried of the 37-acre arboretum later named for him. "It turned out better than I ever could have imagined."

Now president of the [College of Southern Maryland](#), a community college with campuses in three counties, Gottfried cited how his commitment to listening to community ideas and striving to meet the needs of the community led to his dedication to make the arboretum a reality in Fond du Lac.

"The intent was to show how the area looked in the 1600 and 1700s," he noted, "before European settlement... and to make it useful for the college, but also for families, and for teachers and area schoolchildren on field trips."

And while Gottfried had the skill and connections to locate a grant to support the project, the community was required to provide matching funds of \$20,000 for that grant to be awarded.

Citizens came through with the funds -- including \$5,000 from the Fond du Lac Noon Rotary -- as well as expertise and sweat equity.

Local husband and wife team Connie Ramthun and William Volkert -- a natural landscape architect and a Horicon Marsh naturalist -- were instrumental in the initial planning, volunteer coordination and planting.

The UW-Madison Department of Landscape Architecture also took on the plan details as a class project. Faculty, staff and community volunteers did much of the planting of the initial 30 acres, beginning in 1991. Community involvement in the arboretum, including ongoing contributions of time and skill from Ramthun and Volkert, continues.

"After the seeds were sown, we needed to be sure no mustard took hold, as that would wipe out the flowers," Gottfried recalled. "I looked out a window one morning and -- overnight -- the field was loaded with mustard. I had to go out and see what I could do, so I took off my tie and jacket and started pulling. I looked up, and saw that all of these employees had joined in. That vision remains with me."

This type of wide-based project ownership drives him, Gottfried said, noting that he wants the employees, faculty and community of the institutions he heads to find projects enduring and worthy.

The [College for Kids summer program](#) that he instigated at UW-Fond du Lac continues to flourish with community support, and was similarly fruitful at two other institutions he led. Activities that brought the Fond du Lac community to campus proved important during Gottfried's tenure, he said, as the campus previously had not been viewed as a community resource.

Sensitive to the fact that his arrival in 1987 made him the first campus leader to take office after [Dean Willard Henken's](#) 19-year tenure, Gottfried made a point of involving all employees in analyzing the institution's strengths and weaknesses as they undertook the then-novel process of strategic planning.

"So often a new leader comes in with new orders," Gottfried explained. "But the people who have been here know the community better. We wanted to set the direction for the college, but also engage the college community in a dreaming exercise... to emphasize this is not just a paycheck, but you have a major role to play."

The ensuing "Second Generation Plan" focused on the goals of increased/enhanced academic programs, increased enrollment, improved work environment and increased service to the community. "We implemented most things; they were realistic," Gottfried said, highlighting that UW-Fond du Lac growth was strongest in the system while also acknowledging that he wasn't able to see all the desired changes during his Fond du Lac tenure.



Expansion of the campus-based Foundation office led to the start of locally directed fundraising, as a way to supplement state-generated support. Early fundraising solely supported student scholarships.

Even as dean, Gottfried maintained a teaching link to students, leading the first "student success" course in the freshman year experience program, as well as an optional summer study skills workshop. During his tenure, Gottfried also was asked to oversee the prairie education program, a separate unit of the former UW-Center system in which area inmates were able to use Pell Grants to take college courses and earn degrees. He worked closely with the wardens and found the program fascinating.

His professional transition from faculty to department administration led Gottfried to Fond du Lac. At the relatively young age of 37, accepting the position of campus dean in the larger UW System felt like the right next step. He didn't anticipate ill health when he accepted this new challenge, and he refused to let a nearly year-long bout of mononucleosis slow him down. "I was not myself for a year," he recalled, "but I pushed myself to do that job. I never took a day off."

Gottfried considers his time in Fond du Lac nearly idyllic on a personal level, as he and his wife raised two young daughters in the quality of Midwestern life. Former Dean Henken became the Gottfried's neighbor when they coincidentally bought a home on the same street. "He didn't wander over with suggestions. He'd just wave," Gottfried chuckled.

After six years at UW-Fond du Lac, new challenges and the opportunity to "go home" to Philadelphia -- including grandparents, aunts and uncles -- led him to accept the chief academic officer post at Montgomery Community College in Pennsylvania in 1993. He served next as president of Sussex County Community College in New Jersey, before joining CSM as its fourth president in 2006.

He also has authored seven books on a variety of aspects of Gettysburg, noting that his personal dedication to learning and studying led him to return to this topic of interest from youth.

"Those six years in Fond du Lac were among the best in my personal and professional life," Gottfried said. "I learned so much, and wouldn't be where I am now without my Fond du Lac experience. I would definitely do it



Bradley Gottfried

Gottfried Arboretum

William K. Volkert, a Wildlife Educator and Naturalist for the Horicon Marsh, originally proposed the idea of turning a portion of the campus grounds back to prairie around 1980 when he learned that the land was one of the last large stands of original prairie in the Fond du Lac area. The native vegetation had been destroyed, though, by changes in the use of the land - farming, an airport site, and other previous uses.

It took a while, but the idea finally began to take root in 1991 when Volkert and then UW-Fond du Lac Dean Bradley Gottfried met to talk about the concept of developing the prairie on the UW-Fond du Lac campus grounds.

Gottfried had a background in biology and was interested in finding alternatives to mowing the vast landscaped areas surrounding the campus. The establishment of prairies had become a somewhat proven land management technique by this time and was also quite popular.

At the time of European settlement, Fond du Lac County once contained 136,000 acres of prairie and oak savannah, but as a result of surveys done by Volkert, there appeared to be less than 10 acres of original prairie remaining in the County. This realization became the motivation for his efforts to restore some of the prairie to the area.

After Dean Gottfried moved to Pennsylvania, the arboretum project continued with the support of Dean Judy Goldsmith and current UW-Fond du Lac Dean Daniel Blankenship.

Volkert continued to chair the arboretum committee jointly and after working on the arboretum and prairie project for nearly 12 years, he resigned as chairman and began to focus on the development of a new education center at the Horicon Marsh.

The arboretum was named after Dr. Gottfried in recognition of his vision and persistence resulting in the restoration of native prairie for Fond du Lac County residents to enjoy.

[Click here to read more about the Gottfried Arboretum.](#)

...and the... again."

CAMPUS TIDBITS

"The Laker" was the name of the first newspaper on campus. The name was changed to UW-Fond du Lac Reflection in October of 1985.