Ventura Botanical Gardens

2025 ANNUAL REPORT





FROM SEEDLING TO SAPLING





LETTER *from* KEVIN CLERICI

2025 PRESIDENT

FROM SEEDLINGS TO SAPLINGS, WE'RE GROWING OUR FUTURE

Every time I ramble through the Gardens, I am taken with the ever-changing landscape. A pincushion protea that blooms like fireworks. Olive trees inching toward the sky. The newest structure—a towering wooden fernery, a perfect display for exhibits.

As President of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to share this year marked a period of remarkable growth and momentum for us. Thanks to the dedication of our seasoned staff, volunteers, donors, and community partners, the Gardens reached several important milestones that strengthen our mission and expand our impact.

We welcomed a record number of visitors this year—an achievement that reflects both growing regional interest and the exceptional experiences offered across our gardens and trails. Notably, we saw an increase in visitors from outside the Ventura area, further positioning the Gardens as a destination. Visitor surveys conducted in 2025 revealed that 63% of our out-of-town guests spent at least one night in Ventura, directly contributing to our local economy and reinforcing the Gardens' role as a driver of cultural and economic vitality.

This growth translated into meaningful gains in earned revenue, supported by admissions, memberships, and programs. These revenues, combined with strong fundraising results, allowed us to reinvest in operations, education, and long-term planning. We are deeply grateful to our donors and sponsors whose generosity continues to make our work possible.

Education remained a core focus this year. We hosted more skilled student interns than ever before, providing hands-on learning opportunities that inspire future leaders in environmental stewardship, horticulture, and nonprofit management. Their energy and creativity enriched the Gardens in countless ways.

The Board of Directors also made significant progress this year, strengthening governance practices, supporting strategic initiatives, and working closely with staff to ensure financial sustainability and organizational resilience. These efforts help position the Gardens for continued success in the years ahead.

As we look forward, we do so with optimism and gratitude. The Ventura Botanical Gardens is thriving—welcoming more people, expanding its reach, and deepening its contribution to our community. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Kevin M. Clerici



LETTER *from* JOE CAHILL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NO LONGER AN INFANT, BUT A STRONG, GROWING CHILD.

It was a jam-packed year at the Gardens! Both the plants and our organization matured more than ever in 2025, thanks to your generous support. As always, visitors continued to share their enthusiasm for the progress made.

Completing the Fernery, our first shade structure sponsored by Linda and Sky Sylvers, was an important expansion of our nursery space that will enable us to protect endangered plants in our conservation programs.

The new deck looking out over our new pathway through the ravine will play an important role in orienting visitors on tours.

New pathways and stairs in our California native garden dramatically improved connectivity. Visitors can now crisscross the entire area without being restricted to one long winding pathway.

Our staff, interns, and volunteers continued to expand our collections of rare plants, primarily California natives. Many of the areas planted in the last decade have matured and are attractions, while others that are dominated by trees will take centuries to mature.

For our new Australian Garden, we began acquiring plants and building purposeful partnerships with botanic gardens in Australia.

The contrast between new and mature planting areas is a visible part of our progress that visitors appreciate and enjoy.

Exhibits and events kept up with the expansion in other parts of the organization. The new Spring Flower Show, Plein Air Paint-Out, Tomatomania, and the Poinsettia Holiday Flower Show all swelled with creativity and engaged with education. There remains a broad vision to build in the coming years to fulfill our community-created master plan. To be sure, there are challenges ahead—not the least of which is the evaporation of government grant funding for conservation and environmental initiatives. Despite the challenges, our organization continues to grow and mature as our plants do. In comparison to other botanic gardens, we are no longer an infant, but a strong, growing child. Thank you for joining us in a year of amazing and thoughtful progress.

Joe Cahill

EXHIBITS OFFER VISITORS NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH THE GARDENS.

NATURE ON DISPLAY

As we grow, we are experimenting, learning from, and gaining experience with exhibits that offer visitors new ways to engage with the Gardens. In 2025, we hosted botanical-focused exhibits including the Spring Flower Show, Tomatomania and Winter Poinsettia display and sale. From January to March, nesting ceramic birds, created under the direction of local artist Maribel Hernadez, were a concealed delight to be discovered by visitors large and small. The Plein Air Paint-Out brought regional artists to capture the essence of our collections and panoramic views, then exhibit their work. Their work, which provides historic documentation for a point in time.



As our organization matures, annual exhibits are becoming anticipated features on our calendar. The Spring Flower Show, held over Easter weekend, attracted local and regional attention. The displays highlighted the variety of plants available in local





nurseries and presented examples of bespoke floral arrangements to inspire visitors in their own creations. Tomatomania offered seasoned gardeners and beginners alike heirloom and new varieties ready to plant, with expert tips for all things tomato. Enthusiasm for these exhibits means they will be returning to the calendar year after year.

Expanding the number of new and unique exhibits creates excitement and offers learning experiences. These exhibits also attract new audiences to the Gardens. The nesting ceramic birds exhibit was designed to educate and engage visitors

about the fauna living within the gardens and to encourage them to view, and photograph, but not to disturb nests or nesting birds.

Each exhibit provides our staff with opportunities to grow, honing their skills to provide the best possible visitor experience. As our collections grow and mature, our staff leans into the challenge of imagining these spaces. With the addition of new venues such as the Fernery and Observation Deck bookending the Chilean ravine path, the staff crafts new ways to bring these ravine-side spaces to life. Most important for our future is the impact of events on visitor numbers and revenue from gift shop sales, new memberships and unsolicited donations. While all of the exhibits resulted in higher visitor numbers, the Spring Flower show was especially successful with almost 1,800 visitors and significant (+300%) of average weekend revenues.



The Gardens are a notable, largely regional destination for locals and travelers who provide five-star feedback across the internet. Exhibits provide great opportunities to showcase the Gardens and support our mission to educate and engage our ever-growing community of visitors.





GROWING OUR NATIVE TREES

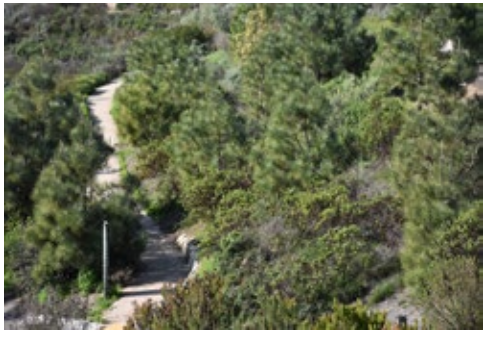
The California pine grove is an exciting, extraordinary and unique environmental experience for our visitors. Beginning in 2019, the planting of these eight native pines continues to this day, and their growth has been dramatic.

One of our most important specimens are the critically endangered Torrey pines *(Pinus torreyana)*. Reaching upwards of 15 feet, they evoke the dramatic coastal bluff habitats characteristic of their native range. Nowhere near full maturity, they already provide a shady respite along our garden pathways.

The Monterey pines *(Pinus radiata)* exhibit similar rapid growth. These wonderful specimens can live up to ninety years. This longevity provides our visitors an opportunity to reflect on temporality; the Monterey pine has roughly the same lifespan as humans, serving as a living mirror to our own lives—an evocative way to measure the enduring growth of our botanical gardens against the passage of generations.

Even more impressive, the California Foothill pine *(Pinus sabiniana)* can live up to 1,000 years, bringing to mind the ancient Greek proverb: *"A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."* These trees will be long-standing pillars of resilience as the world traverses the millennium.





Nestled under our pines, the collection of California Manzanita *(arctostaphylos)* continues to grow as we add new plants each year. The manzanita has forever stood as an iconic sentinel of the American West. Its subtle, resinous fragrance and smooth red bark evoke a sense of adventure, reminiscent of hiking through the forested hills and mountains that define California.

Together with the pines, the manzanitas now form an important wildlife habitat. This grove provides sustenance and protection for countless mammals, insects, reptiles and birds. It acts as an oasis on our tree-barren hillsides especially during the hot Ventura summers.

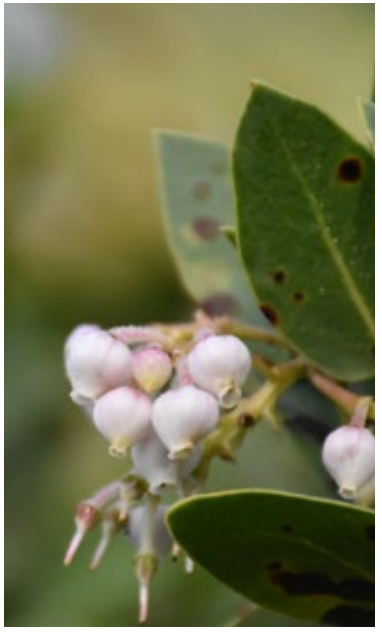
At this stage, our trees have become remarkably self-sufficient. They no longer require supplemental watering—a testament to how successfully they have integrated into our local landscape.

With this flourishing grove, visitors are invited to enjoy a sensory, ecological, and historic journey as they travel through our pine collection. It is an immersive experience of new growth and beauty, made possible entirely by your support.




NATURE RAMBLE









THE FERNERY: SHADE AND EXHIBIT SPACE

Great things are happening with the opening of the Fernery, our brand new space for shade plants, seedlings, new exhibits and shows. Sponsored by Linda and Sky Sylvers as a legacy gift for the entire community, the Fernery exemplifies their belief that through generous giving, we enhance the quality of life for ourselves, our families, and our community.

Architect Noah Greer worked with a volunteer committee of professionals to create this contemporary twist on a traditional lath house. The design reflects the sloping hillsides and three converging pathways that meet at the site. The view of the building engages visitors up close, but also from a distance.

From the approaching path, a first glimpse of the lifted eaves emerge from the surrounding flora. As the walkway continues, a hairpin turn curves beneath the dramatically cantilevered roof. From the highest points in the garden, the roof reads as a single surface, warping in response to the dynamic topography.



This important expansion of our nursery space enables us to protect threatened and endangered plants in our conservation programs through propagation. Visitors on educational tours and at special events in the Fernery get a behind the scenes look at our key core horticultural activities. Developed to reduce sunlight by thirty percent, the Fernery provides the best environment to encourage shade loving plants and new propagations to thrive.

Our first exhibit, in December 2025, was our Winter Poinsettia Show displaying over 25 poinsettia varieties. Visitors were able to experience the radiant reds, greens, pinks, and yellows (including some charming miniature blooms) and learn about how Ventura County played an important role in the poinsettia's rise to fame. Educational signage explained the poinsettia's journey from wildflower to holiday icon and its deep roots in our local horticultural heritage. Using the Fernery as the setting for this show, allowed us to protect these beautiful plants from sun and wind.

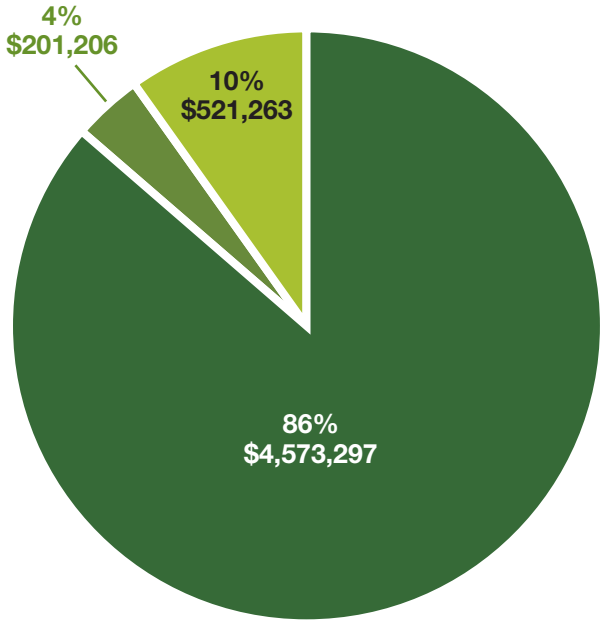


This lath house is an important new gift to the Gardens. The Sylvers hope their contribution will inspire others to give generously ensuring the continued growth of the Gardens.

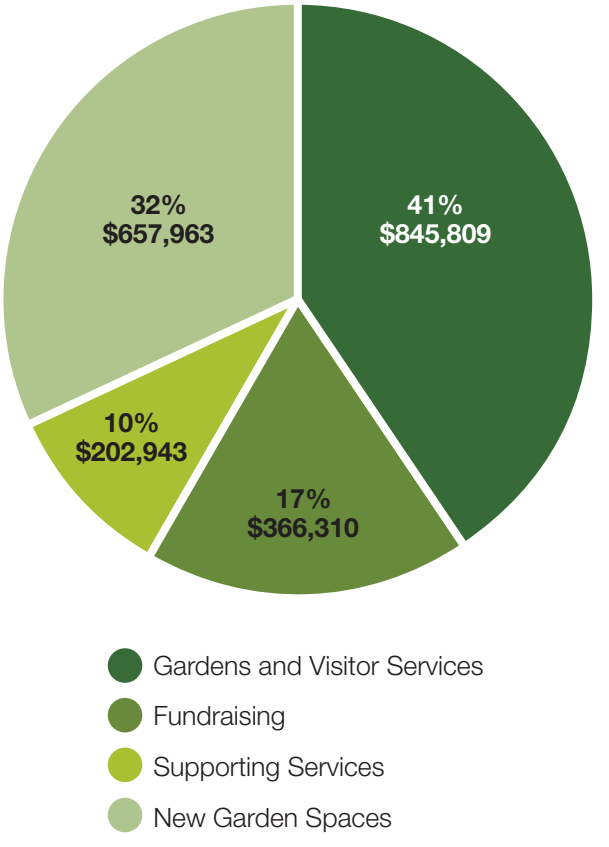
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

For the Years Ended December 31, 2025
(Unaudited)

INCOME



EXPENSES



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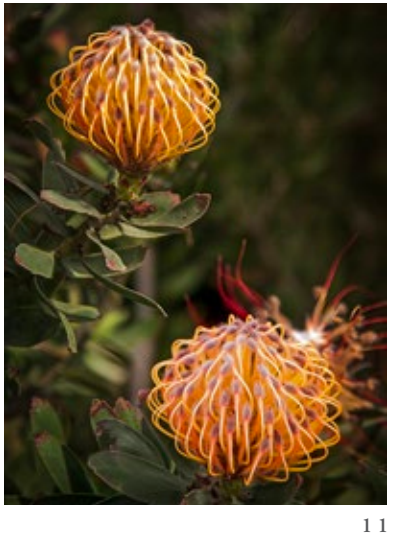
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or call (805) 232-3113

P.O. Box 3127 | Ventura, CA 93006-3127

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PHOTOS BY PHIL RANGER, JOE CAHILL, BARBARA BROWN,
SAVANNAH DOSS, ALICIA BARRETO, SONYA NICHOLS, PAMELA FISHER