

EQUIPPED WITH THE SUNSHINE COAST'S

natural beauty and climate, the Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden Society set an ambitious goal to create a Pacific Northwest Botanical Garden that would attract visitors from the region and beyond.

'Project GroundWork' began in 2009 with the purchase of a parcel of land to serve as an educational and demonstration site for visitors. It now features themed gardens – including a food garden which donates more than 1,200 pounds per year to the local community – as well as a West Coast-style building, which is well-used for conferences, meetings, events, cultural gatherings, and more.

"The \$370,000 from ICET became the anchor point that helped us to raise the rest of the \$1.5M budget," said Garden Manager Mary Blockberger. "It also helped us raise our profile, attracting hundreds of volunteers who have turned an idea into reality in just a few short years."

One goal of ICET funded projects is to bring economic impact and spin-offs beyond the borders of an individual project. In the case of the Botanical Gardens, destination weddings are a new niche market, creating business opportunities for photographers, caterers, hair stylists, transportation, and a whole host of other services.

ONE GOAL OF ICET FUNDED PROJECTS IS TO BRING ECONOMIC IMPACT AND SPIN-OFFS BEYOND THE BORDERS OF AN INDIVIDUAL PROJECT.

The Garden's vibrant spring colours and stunning views are the perfect backdrop for photos. With a capacity for up to 100 guests, it is no surprise that the Sparling Pavilion has become a focal point for destination wedding celebrations.

"The Botanical Garden is one of our favourite locations for weddings on the Sunshine Coast, and our clients just love the intimate feeling they get there," said Melissa Tripp, owner of Coastal Weddings and Events. "Without a doubt, the Garden has helped my business grow and succeed."

Even at its relatively young stage of growth, the speed at which the Botanical Garden has achieved growth in visitor numbers is impressive. Since its completion in 2012, the number of total visitors has exceeded projections. In 2015, more than 9,000 people visited the gardens, with nearly 40% of those coming from outside the Sunshine Coast.

An economic impact analysis of the Botanical Garden monetizes its success at a quarter million dollars of new spending annually, which supports three new full-time equivalent jobs in the area. As the garden matures over the years and decades to reach its full potential, the economic impact will also continue to grow.

For people like Paddy Wales, who helped guide this project from concept to reality, there are many additional and equally important measures of success, such as community pride and volunteerism. The Society now has more than 800 members, and hundreds of active volunteers donating almost 10,000 hours annually.

The Garden also plays an important role in the attraction of new residents who are seeking a great quality of life.

"The rate of population growth in Sechelt is higher than other Sunshine Coast communities, and people have told us that the Garden is part of the reason they choose to move here or stay here," said Wales. "This is an age-friendly facility that gives people a chance to be outdoors and stay connected to gardening, and that's a big factor for us."

"One of the key elements of successful economic development in smaller communities is making sure you've got amenities that attract tourists, but also retain and attract new residents," Blockberger said. "The Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden does both, beautifully."



PROJECT PROFILE

SUNSHINE COAST BOTANICAL GARDEN



\$1.5 MILLION BUDGET	\$370,000 ICET CONTRIBUTION	2009 PROJECT START DATE	2011 OPENING DATE	2016 FIVE YEAR ANNIVERSARY
--------------------------------	---------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-----------------------------	--------------------------------------