

Green Star Awards

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Western Michigan University Kalamazoo, Mich.

Western Michigan University (WMU), located in Kalamazoo, is a campus of 745 acres of intensely maintained areas. **Director of Landscape Services Tim Holysz** and his landscape crew of 47 professionals have the daunting task of overseeing this campus, but have proved by using creative and sustainable practices, it is possible.

WMU is located close to a large concentration of bedding plant growers, giving them the advantage of access to quality plant material. Holysz plants over 150 larger planters that are positioned at the entrances of most every building, academic and residence halls. "Reliable annuals such as geraniums, wave petunias, million bells, sweet potato vine, salvia, coleus, impatiens and begonias are common, but using the newest varieties adds spice to the extensive palette of color our staff enjoys," he said. In addition to the planters, there are various gardens spread around the campus that are changed seasonally. In the spring, Daffodils, tulips, hyacinth, alliums, crocus, anemone, chionodoxa, camassia, fritillaria, galanthus, muscari, scilla all brighten the landscape once the snow fades. Summer color comes from Hostas, pulmonaria, ferns, bleeding hearts and cranesbills, just to name a few. In the fall over 1,000 mums, flowering cabbage and kale, snapdragons, ornamental peppers, and chard replace the fading warm season annuals. Even winter is full of landscape interest by using ornamental



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grasses, fruiting shrubs and ornamental trees to carry through the long Michigan winters. Whatever the season, the landscape crew strives to maximize the beauty and diversity of the gardens and give the WMU community a point of pride when friends and family visit the campus.

Although the landscape is continuously filled with vibrant color, perhaps the main attractions on the campus are the various water features. "The largest water feature on our landscape is the 3.5 acre Goldsworth Valley pond. This open water of the state serves the campus community with many ecological services, storm water control, wildlife habitat, and passive recreation open space," Holysz explained. Wildlife that call this pond home include deer, fox, raccoon, opossum, skunk, squirrels, bats, rabbits, turtles, song birds, woodpeckers, red tailed hawks and the occasional coyote. Surrounding the entire pond perimeter is an innovative project completed by the landscape crew over eight years ago. Planted in a 20' buffer around the open water and wet areas is a diverse community of Michigan native prairie and wetland species that helps to protect the pond. Landscape services used Michigan genotype seed and plants, reminiscent of Southwest Michigan 300 years ago. While the pond



maintenance has required use of algae control, most recently a research project investigating Biofuel from algae has set up a temporary greenhouse near the pond using an area that is never treated. The fountains are



cleaned regularly and removed before the pond freezes. An area is kept free from ice near the swan feeders by bubblers that run off campus heating infrastructure. Landscape services does not fertilize areas around the pond, mowing and hand cutting is the primary management technique used, with special emphasis on removing invasive plant species.

"Perhaps the most iconic water feature on campus is the 6,400 square foot Miller Plaza fountain pool," Holysz said. "Located near the academic and performing arts centers of campus this large plaza is a major thoroughfare for campus. With a generous smattering of tables, benches,



lawns, and sitting walls this space accommodates all our graduations and large social events on campus. The focal point for this space is the dynamic fountain display the Miller Plaza pool provides."

One of the newest water features is a result of WMU and the landscape services commitment to the Michigan storm water initiative. Once a parking lot on the bank of the Arcadia creek, a detention pond now drains many impervious services on campus. This feature protects the watershed and beyond by slowing turbulent water before it leaves campus for the Kalamazoo River. The feature is surrounded by a landscape of native grasses, forbs, wetland emergents, and shrubs.

“WMU has made great efforts to embrace sustainability and storm water initiatives on campus,” Holysz exclaimed. Surrounding the campus storm water basins, the campus pond, rain gardens and the recently constructed engineering complex, are extensive native plantings that represent some of the most important native prairie species of the Midwest. Big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian grass, drop seed, prairie smoke, leadplant, baptisia, sunflowers, liatris, echinacea, lobelias, milkweeds, silphiums, and asters all add to the wildlife value, aesthetics and sustainability of the campus environment. WMU is home to over 40 storm water features on campus that serve the dual role of enhancing the campus environment while also treating the contamination and flow problems associated with storm water. Landscaping around these features has an emphasis on low maintenance and native vegetation. “Each storm water feature is designed for a specific location, taking into account the conditions and issues of that area. Along with the micro-conditions of the area, these features are also designed with a holistic approach, taking campus as a whole and the surrounding watersheds into consideration,” he explained.

Keeping a commitment to sustainability at the heart of the landscape maintenance plan, Holysz and his crew use several other sustainable practices including: using mulching mowers for routine mowing and mulching of leaves during the fall season; recycling all yard waste and composting; use of IPM practices for all pest control activities; use of beet juice as a pre-wetting agent for rock salt; and computerization of the irrigation system to the BAS (building automated systems) watering off the daily rates realizing a 15% savings in water use, among many others.

Sustainability and the creative practices of it are at the center of Holysz’s dynamic landscape maintenance plan. Together with his landscape crew they have created a campus that serves as both aesthetic eye candy and an environmentally friendly area. A fete well deserving of the 2009 Green Star Honor award it received.