

Grow Ikebana Forum

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I'd like to thank the Growing Ikebana Committee for allowing me a few minutes to speak to you about our program with Dickinson College. Dickinson is a small liberal arts college in south central Pennsylvania.

In 2011, with a shrinking membership and plummeting funds we had to re-evaluate our spending, especially on educational outreach.

Targeting younger children rendered little lasting or measurable success in growing Ikebana.

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I was working at Dickinson College library at the time. Dickinson has a remarkable beautiful campus. Its beauty seemed unnoticed by student's whose noses were buried in cell phones. As an experiment I took plant material from campus and made arrangements for the circulation desk, noting where on campus the material was cut.

It sparked conversation and I was surprised by the complexity of students' questions. Sharing this with Harrisburg board, we met, and discussed what moored us to Ikebana. It was Ikebana's meditative and spiritual tenets as well as the study of and, communion with, nature that adhered our hearts to this art. We agreed that these concepts were too sophisticated to be embraced by elementary school children. Which, there to fore, was a target for the Sowing Seeds Program.

So, without shame, we endeavored to insert ourselves in Dickinson College.

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We began by approaching the Department of East Asian Studies and asked if they would sponsor a demonstration and exhibition on campus. The amazing Ana Nakada, from the Ichiyo School, agreed to come for a two-day event. On the success of this we were invited into the classroom over a number of semesters. Whether this was comparative eastern religions or the Asian Aesthetic Club, our members offered their time and talent.

Throughout this process we maintained we could not afford to pay for materials - plant or hardware.

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Harrisburg approached Ann Dailey, the master gardener for the college, with the idea of "purposeful planting". The notion being, the college would plant what we need to support the classroom curriculum. This collaboration expanded when Dr. David Strand wrote an received a grant from the LUCE Foundation entitled "Luce Initiative on East Asian Studies and the Environment." Ikebana was featured and funded by the grant.

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With funding, we provided a comprehensive list of indigenous plants, shrubs and trees needed for ikebana. We took part in cataloging the existing plants on campus.

Here is a picture of one of the mature gardens. Through donations we amassed classroom sets of containers, shears, kenzans and the like. Today, students take home their arrangements and we provide a drop box location for the return of materials.

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We are in the classroom in the fall semester and, usually host a spring program open to student, faculty and staff as well as regional II chapters and garden clubs. Students sign in and are given extra credit or points for attendance. Our last event was entitled "Farm to Tokonoma" sponsored by the Department of Environmental Studies; we worked a local grower, Meadowbrook Farms Gourds. This program featured the gracious and tremendously gifted Sheila Advani of the Sogetsu School.

I began by talking about measurable success. How does Harrisburg know that it is succeeding? We feel if we continue to be invited back to campus, we are making an impact.

I'd love to share with you a grainy picture taken by an English major who attended an open library event during finals week.

We set up a program with Ichiyo Master, Kay Cramer. We made an announcement over the library PA system if anyone wanted to take a study break, there is a free Ikebana activity and you can take your arrangement back to your study carrel. 15 students meandered in.

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The next year Marie Grey, one of the 15, took a semester abroad in Toulouse, France and while travelling sent us this picture. This is what we aspire to in a Growing Ikebana Program – that the students we touch recognize and value the art form. And, when their life presents the opportunity to partake, they engage fully.

Membership is the word on everyone's lips.

Our Treasurer/Membership Officer is here at the conference, Dr. Greg Lewis. He will tell you our numbers have remained fairly steady. Like many chapters, the mean age of our members is inching upward.

Senior members are our most valuable assets. Accruing the young and exposing them to seniors' skill and artistry is our challenge. How do we link a millennial, whose world is immediate, with an artisan whose life has been dedicated to a longer, contemplative journey?

Ikebana's dwindling numbers are incontrovertible evidence that what we have done in the past no longer working. Make no mistake, there is no blame. Recruitment strategies then and now are designed for the times we live in. Harrisburg struggles with adapting too! We are not going down without a fight.

We decided to consult professionals. Real professionals who are in the business of recruitment and fundraising. I asked a career recruiter for the United States Marine Corps, "How do you get an 18- to 24-year-old to sign on the dotted line?" He replied, "Mam, any branch of the U.S. military can promise three squares a day...I make no promises to a candidate beyond this: If you become a Marine you will be a part of the worlds' elite fighting force, you will join a long and decorated brotherhood, whose hallmarks are fidelity, honor and courage...but if you want to turn a wrench on a tank for the army, go next door!"

What did II Harrisburg learn from the Marines? We learned to assess the softer side, the intangibles that separate us from your neighborhood garden club. It is the philosophy, the meditative, the spiritual communion with place that separates us.

So, we began to target a demographic that could fully understand and embrace what we had to offer.

We consulted a professional fundraiser. The first thing they said was you have to spend money to make money. We said, "we have no money!" Their answer was, "Then, you need to have institutional buy-in. You need to have others spend their money for what you have to offer." Building the program with Dickinson has been an exercise in institutional buy-in. You don't need to have a college near you. This can be done with corporations, or non- academic institutions as well.

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In both the fundraising and recruitment advice, marketing was a key factor. Marketing and advertising are the best way to get your product out there and it is the quickest way to deplete your coffers. We have all experienced this conundrum.

Harrisburg is still trying to break the code on this. Recently, Vistaprint ran a special. For less than the price of a BigMac meal we had 500 business cards made. Every member is charged with giving out ten cards this month. We believe WE are our best marketing tools. Our lapel pins are designed as conversation starters and the card is the closer. The demographic we are trying to hit lives online. We need to get them to our website to round out our strategy.

If we merely think of ourselves as a club, we will suffer the fate of so many other worthy organizations. We will dye vying for a generation of non-joiners. We must think like a business in crisis and seek the professionals who have the skills to help us prevail. **And, then share the strategies that work. I need to say that again...Share the strategies that work!**

When I ask college students if they would like to join Ikebana International, they invariably ask, "How is it international? What do I get if I join?" It is amazing how quickly I become a Marine Recruiter. In 2018 one in ten American college students studied abroad.

No question, we need to augment the International in Ikebana. And, I'd love to talk to anyone who is interested in global education and Ikebana.

We need to act locally, collaborate regionally and educate internationally. The potential members we seek are global thinkers who understand a planet in crisis. This is a generation of advocates. They can benefit from Ikebana. They educate themselves, shop, play and find communities online. Ikebana must actively exist in that space to survive.

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Here is a picture of an arrangement by Daniele Mizuta, an exchange student who came to Dickinson from Brazil. We stay in touch through social media. She now teaches Sangetsu near Santa Cantarina, Brazil.

Our wonderful students are about to enter the most transient phase of their lives. Moving from college to first jobs, some internationally. My hope is to have students continue to apprise us of their movement. And, we in Harrisburg contact you in Phoenix, Montreal or Mexico City to reach out to them, mentor them and together we GROW IKEBANA.