

In 1993, a group of dedicated volunteers got together and formed Friends of Plant Park as a 501 (c) 3 organization. Our mission was to (a) assist with the restoration and maintenance of the Henry B. Plant Park as a botanical garden open to the public, (b) research and publicize the Victorian history of the park and (c) educate the public and cultivate community interest in and support for the foregoing activities. The true challenge was to merge the front yard of a historic Victorian hotel with the front yard of a thriving, metropolitan university.

We began by teaming up with the University maintenance staff to start a cleanup of the existing park plantings. Our volunteers got down and dirty, weeding and cleaning out the exotic nuisance foliage surrounding "Biology Creek" which extends from under the Hotel to the Hillsborough river.

We thoroughly researched Anton Fiehe's original design for the park, including his extensive list of plantings. And in 1998 we launched "GreenFest" our signature fundraising/public awareness campaign to support our efforts.

In 2001, H. B. Plant Park's 4.5 acres was designated a local historic landmark. We commissioned a master plan for the renovation/rehabilitation of the park. Following this plan, we planted numerous Victorian flower beds including the beautiful Star Bed, created a garden folly to exhibit the Civil War cannons which Henry Plant brought from Ft. Brooke, erected a replica of the original 112' flagpole with an 1896 forty-five-star U.S. flag, and restored the famous cabbage palm walk. We have installed 25 park benches that are duplicates of the original benches. They are dedicated to long-time friends of Plant Park and famous people who have visited the park. A cell phone and an internet audio tour was created to help educate our visitors as to the impressive history of the park and the current use by students and the public. We worked hard and are very proud of our accomplishments. Endowments have been established at the University of Tampa and the Community Foundation of Tampa to continue to fund the park's preservation.