

OLBRICH BOTANICAL GARDENS:

A Blooming Economic Force in Madison



Executive Summary

Olbrich Botanical Gardens, a 16-acre urban oasis in Madison, continues to thrive as one of the region's top visitor destinations. In 2025, more than 393,000 guests explored its outdoor gardens, Bolz Conservatory and community events - experiences that connect people with nature while supporting Madison's tourism economy.

A survey of 610 visitors, deployed between June and September, revealed that Olbrich is both a local favorite and a key travel motivator, as nearly half (45%) cited the Gardens as their primary reason for visiting the area. Visitors' spending extends well beyond admission, with significant impacts on restaurants, lodging and retail businesses.

Overall, visitor spending contributed an estimated \$20.1 million to Dane County's economy in 2025. Repeat visitation remains strong, and satisfaction is exceptionally high - with 94% rating their experience as "excellent" or "good."

Olbrich's continued growth highlights its dual role as both a beloved community asset and a powerful tourism driver, fueling local business vitality and quality of life in the Madison region.

**Visitors to
Olbrich Botanical
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over \$20.1 million
annually for the
Dane County
economy.**



Cultivating Beauty, Education and Connection in Madison

Since opening its doors in 1952, Olbrich Botanical Gardens has grown into one of Madison's most beloved public spaces - a collaboration between the City of Madison and the nonprofit Olbrich Botanical Society. Together, these partners maintain and expand a living museum of plants that welcomes more than 390,000 visitors annually.

Spanning 16 acres of outdoor gardens and the iconic Bolz Conservatory, Olbrich offers experiences that inspire learning, relaxation and stewardship of the natural world. Its programs range from horticultural education and sustainability workshops to family festivals and art installations that celebrate seasonal beauty.

Supported by dedicated staff, volunteers and community partners, Olbrich continues to evolve as both an environmental and economic asset for the area. Ongoing projects - from expanded garden spaces to enhanced visitor amenities - demonstrate a shared commitment to accessibility, inclusivity and growth.

Through this partnership of people and purpose, Olbrich continues to cultivate not just gardens, but connection - between visitors, neighbors and the greater Madison community.



Who Visits Olbrich and Why They Return

The 2025 visitor survey paints a vivid picture of Olbrich's audience: diverse, engaged and deeply connected to the Madison region. Of the 610 respondents, roughly two-thirds live in nearby Madison-area ZIP codes, while others traveled from across Wisconsin, the Midwest and even abroad - with visitors from the UK, Brazil, Singapore and beyond.

Olbrich's appeal spans generations and backgrounds. The audience is predominantly female (69%) and middle-aged, but includes strong representation across all age groups. Nearly half (45%) of respondents came specifically to visit the gardens, underscoring Olbrich's role as a primary travel motivator within Dane County's tourism economy.

Visitor loyalty is exceptional: 55% were repeat visitors, and 86% stayed between one and three hours. Many travel in family groups, averaging 3.7 people, and nearly half stay overnight, with an average of 1.9 nights in the area.

These patterns affirm Olbrich's dual identity as both a cherished local tradition and a magnet for regional tourism, where first-time guests quickly become lifelong supporters drawn by beauty, relaxation and connection.

Olbrich Visitors



ORIGINS

65% local

Visitors from 8 countries

KEY MOTIVATION

45% came specifically to visit Olbrich Botanical Gardens

BEHAVIORS

45% stayed one or more nights

55% repeat visitors

86% stay 1-3 hours



A Growing Source of Local Spending and Economic Vitality

Visitors to Olbrich Botanical Gardens make a measurable contribution to Dane County's economy, spending across lodging, dining, retail and recreation during their visits. Survey data from summer 2025 revealed that nearly half of all visitors stayed overnight, averaging 1.9 nights in the area. Among overnight guests, 41% stayed in hotels and 38% with friends or family - a strong reflection of Olbrich's mix of tourism and community-based appeal.

On average, Olbrich visitors spent \$39 per person per trip, generating an estimated \$20.1 million in local economic activity in 2025. Dining and lodging were the two largest spending categories, with 86% of respondents reporting restaurant or grocery purchases and 75% noting lodging or camping expenses.

Olbrich visitor spending supports local jobs and tax revenues through multiplier effects that extend into Madison's hospitality, retail and service sectors. These dollars strengthen neighborhood businesses and reinforce the gardens' role as both a cultural and economic cornerstone of the community.

Growing Community Well-Being Through Nature and Connection

While the gardens' economic contribution is substantial, the true value of Olbrich Botanical Gardens extends far beyond spending. Visitors consistently describe Olbrich as a place of renewal, learning and connection - a natural refuge in the heart of Madison that enhances quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Survey results show 94% of guests rated their visit as excellent or good, underscoring Olbrich's reputation for delivering meaningful experiences. Families explore the outdoor gardens together, students learn through educational programs, and volunteers contribute 20,000+ hours annually to sustaining the grounds and events.

Olbrich also enriches Madison's environmental health by modeling sustainable horticultural practices, supporting pollinator habitats and offering programs that inspire stewardship of the natural world. Through exhibitions, concerts and community celebrations, the gardens cultivate creativity and belonging - proving that the beauty of a public garden can ripple outward into every part of community life.



"Olbrich isn't just a garden - it's where our community comes to breathe, celebrate and reconnect. Every visit reminds me why Madison is such a special place to live."
- Caroline Bohler,
Vice President, Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society



Economic Significance to Dane County



393,808
visitors



\$20.1 million
economic activity



146 local jobs
supported



\$1.3 million
state & local taxes

Building the Next Chapter of Growth and Connection

With a legacy rooted in community partnership and environmental stewardship, Olbrich Botanical Gardens is looking ahead to its next era of growth. The insights from the 2025 visitor survey and economic analysis will directly inform Olbrich's upcoming Comprehensive Master Plan, guiding decisions on visitor amenities, sustainability initiatives, potential garden expansion and educational programming for the next 20 years.

Survey respondents shared clear priorities for the future: expanded café and food options (50%), more outdoor gardens (22%), and enhancements to the Children's Garden (12%) and parking and signage (11%). Each of these improvements aims to deepen visitor engagement and extend the time guests spend in the gardens and the surrounding community.

As Olbrich evolves, its mission remains constant - to enrich lives and inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world. Further investment in facilities, partnerships and programming will ensure that this Madison treasure continues to blossom as a cultural, environmental and economic cornerstone for generations to come.



"Olbrich is a local treasure and a hidden gem for those visiting the area. There is something for everyone from the new children's garden, the Thai Pavilion, Butterflies exhibit and summer concert series - even those who aren't garden enthusiasts will love the lush landscapes and thoughtful touches. This is a must do on your 'Things to see in Madison' list!"

- Alex McMillan, Boston Resident



Methodology

The economic analysis is based on visitor data collected using the Olbrich Botanical Gardens Economic Impact Survey (2025). The survey was conducted between June 22 and September 10, 2025, using an online questionnaire distributed via in-person outreach and digital channels. A total of 610 visitors responded, providing a statistically meaningful snapshot of visitor behavior, spending patterns and travel motivations during peak visitation months.

Results were extrapolated to represent all visitors during the study period (as counted by Olbrich Gardens' routine visitor counting methodologies) and then scaled to annual visitation using 2024 attendance data (372,314 total visitors).

The economic contributions of visitor spending to the Dane County economy were estimated using a sales area multiplier calculated using 2024 U.S. Census Bureau data and the formula provided by Wen-Huei Chen in "Variations in multipliers and related economic ratios for recreation and tourism impact analysis" (Michigan State University, 2001). A capture rate of 85% was applied to reflect the proportion of visitor spending that is retained in the local economy. The regional spending multiplier of 1.53 is consistent with comparable tourism impact studies. Other impacts (jobs, tax revenue) were estimated using ratios reported by Travel Wisconsin for the economic impact of tourism in Dane County in 2024.



OutdoorRecreation.wi.gov



Olbrich.org



HarbingerConsult.com



gleam[®]
2025





ATTENDANCE

Record attendance!! In 2025, 39,000+ guests enjoyed GLEAM at the Gardens - 6% more than in 2024!

Over the past 10 years **200,000+ GUESTS** have come together to explore the Gardens in a whole new light!



32 nighttime GLEAM viewings account for close to 10% of the Gardens' annual guest attendance.

WOW!

Attendance increased **30%** **in September** compared to 2024 due to good weather and new pop-up performances!

New Supporters

Amongst the guests who completed the post-visit survey (10%), 500 people identified as first time visitors to the Gardens. To date, GLEAM has attracted 5,000+ new potential supporters!



VOLUNTEERS

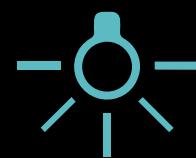
Every year, an average of 80 volunteers spend approximately 814 hours enhancing the experience by guiding guests and providing exhibit insights.

Volunteers contributed 8,000 hours of service since 2015!

17 volunteers served as GLEAM hosts for the first time this year.

22 volunteers each worked 15+ hours to support the exhibit!

One volunteer dedicated 45 hours to ensuring guests were welcomed and well organized for the check-in process!



THE ARTISTS

Since 2015, GLEAM has created public art opportunities for over 80 light-based artists from 6 countries and 40 cities.

2025 POPULAR VOTE

#1 - *Astral Relics of the Great North Woods* by FuzzPop Workshop

"It invoked a sense of cosmic wonder. The scale, colors, sounds, and overall design of the inflatables made me feel awe, nervousness, and respect for the mysteries of nature and the universe."



#2 - *Reflections in Nature* by Chaske Haverko

"Synthesizing nature and music to create such an impressive visual collage."

"Any artwork that draws that much positive engagement from audience (laughing, dancing, pointing, talking to one another about the experience) is an exceptional piece of art."

#3 - *The Beholder* by James Tapscott

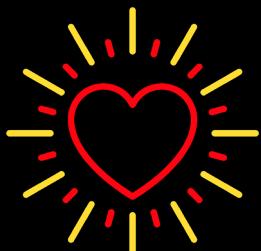
"Stunning and unique, this work spoke wonders of worlds we may not fully grasp if only we look up to ask questions."

CONNECTIONS

The Autism Society of South Central Wisconsin hosted a **sensory friendly GLEAM viewing**, inviting members of this community to enjoy the exhibit in a quieter setting with reduced capacities.

At least two couples got engaged at GLEAM, including a member of Olbrich's staff!

"This year was extra memorable because my fiance proposed at GLEAM! He found a secluded spot on the accessible ramp near the Tri-Aisle. GLEAM is an event that I look forward to every year and have attended with him before, so it was special to us."



AIR WAVES

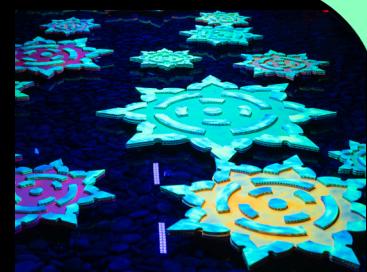
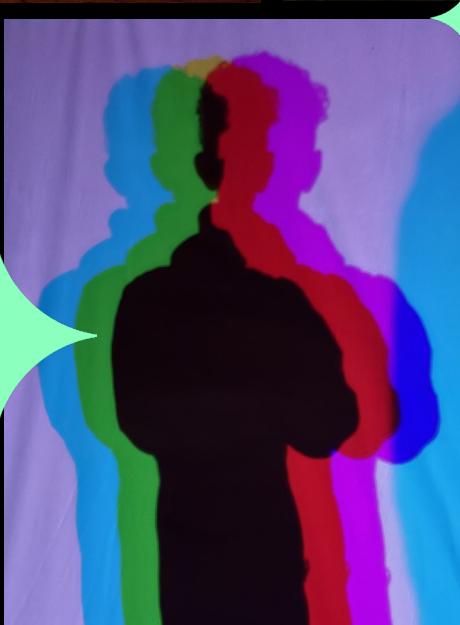
Cultivating Place, an award-winning public radio program and podcast that explores how gardens and gardeners are intersectional spaces and agents for positive change in our world, interviewed two of GLEAM's co-creators to discuss how incorporating light-based artwork enhances the natural beauty of the Gardens, allowing the community to see the landscape in a whole new light!

Light-based artworks first featured at GLEAM have gone on to be exhibited throughout Madison at the Children's Museum, West Gilman St, and Garver Feed Mill!



GLIMMER POPS! ✨

Traditions Lighting and Olbrich's GLEAM Team created a new exhibit title sign and custom wayfinding effects to lead guests through the exhibit and enhance the overall experience!



SUPPORT

BIGGEST FUNDRAISER

GLEAM is the Gardens' most profitable public program! Over the past decade, GLEAM has generated over **\$2 million dollars in financial support to further Olbrich's mission** to enrich lives & inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world!



Approximately \$10,000 in additional donations are generated each year through GLEAM ticket transactions!

A pop-up gift shop on Fridays & Saturdays in October sold 463 items including light-up gear, glow rocks, and custom designed GLEAM t-shirts raising close to \$2,000 (net).



The Bradbury Family, Sprinkman Real Estate, Jenni & Kyle Foundation, and MG&E Foundation contributed **\$35,000 in GLEAM sponsorships!**

