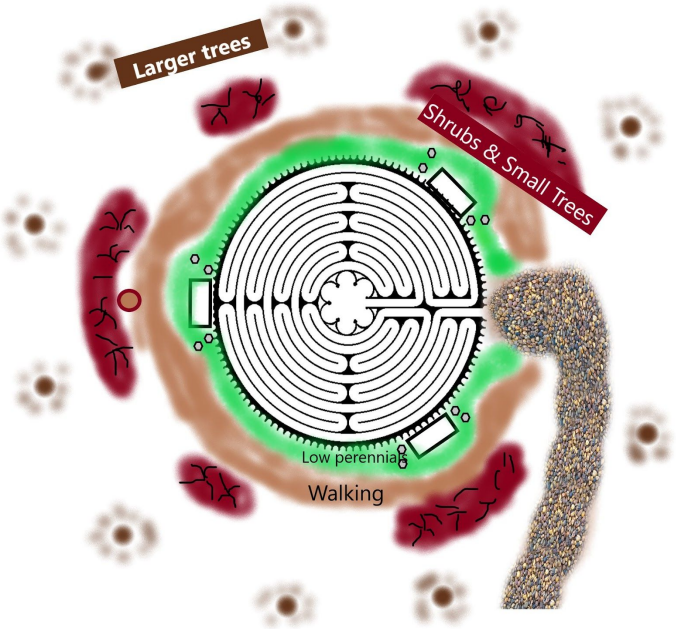
OWU Labyrinth area beautification, restoration, and improvement project.

A modest proposal for 2018 and the future.

Executive Summary:

Steve Herminghausen, OWU class of ‘86, is proposing to plant a variety of mostly native perennials, shrubs, and trees this year to highlight and beautify the OWU Labyrinth. The basic layout includes an inner ring of low, spreading perennials (phlox, ferns, sedum, asters, spring ephemeral wildflowers, etc.) extending out about 4 feet around the edge of the labyrinth to serve as a border. Outside this inner ring will be another ring of grass or walkable ground cover about 6-7 feet wide to allow walking around the outside of the labyrinth. Stepping stones will allow access through the inner border to the benches.

Two rings made up of island-like beds will define and frame the labyrinth area. The inner of these will consist of shrubs (spicebush, native bush honeysuckle, viburnums, nine-barks, etc.) and open-form small trees (dogwoods, redbuds, serviceberry, fringe). The outer ring will be larger trees that will eventually take the place of existing trees as they decline. Larger trees will consist of large “monument-like” trees (sycamores, oaks) and spreading, multi-trunk trees (birch). The “islands” will be surrounded by mulch/hardwood chips and be underplanted with native ground covers and understory plants to reduce mowing and prevent mowing related damage.



Costs and benefits.

Plant material: The innermost border ring area is approximately 320 sf. Using a variety of plugs and gallon potted plants, the cost for plants to fill the area could range from $300 to $1200. Shrubs and small trees (gallon up to 5 gallon) used in the outer island rings could range from $5 to $50 each depending on size, for a total ranging from $800 to $1800. Larger trees will vary greatly depending on initial size. Small specimens become established more quickly and after 3-5 years often outperform large caliper trees whose roots were damaged in transplanting. However, small trees do not have the visual impact during those early years. Young trees may cost as little as $10. More mature ball & burlap or large container trees may range from $50 to $250 each. Total costs for all plant material range from $1200 using landscape plugs and young shrubs and trees to around $4,000 if larger, more mature plants are used.

Labor: Initial preparation and planting can be accomplished over the course of 3 or 4 weeks using largely volunteer labor (Master Gardeners, Tree House and other SLU students, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists, and members of other environmental organizations). Ongoing maintenance in the first years will be important. In the first growing season, adequate watering will be necessary to ensure the plants survive and become established. Hand watering of the area with a hose and wand would probably take 2 hours, 2 to 3 times a week from May to September depending on rainfall. Whether volunteers, contractors, or OWU staff take on maintenance will, of course, affect the cost.

Benefits: In addition to intangible aesthetic benefits of beautifying the area and making it more attractive to members of the OWU and Delaware communities, the native plant selections will provide food and habitat to native birds and insects, including a variety of pollinators. In

addition, the habitat and the fauna that habitat attracts can be used for educational purposes across many if not most curricula. Additional planting in the area may also contribute to the improved water quality of the area as run off is reduced.

Funding and sourcing: Friends and family of Georgia Blum will likely defray a large portion of the initial planting. In addition, some local organizations are available to provide plant material. Finally, a variety of public and private grants could be used to fund aspects of the project.

The longer, sketched draft of the plan

Impetus for the plan -

This plan is conceived and dedicated to the memory of Steve's wife, Georgia Blum, OWU class of 1988, who passed away from cancer in the fall of 2017. During her final months Steve pledged to continue to make the world a more beautiful place after her death. In keeping with Georgia's love of nature and interest in sharing this love with others and promoting environmental stewardship, this ongoing project will use native plants that support wildlife and improve the Ohio Wesleyan University campus. Even though this project begins this year with the labyrinth area, Steve intends to continue his support to improve all parts of the campus and surrounding areas for the rest of his life and beyond through planned giving. Thoughts for other areas and future projects will follow later in this document.

First steps and celebration -

Steve, Chaplain Jon Powers, and Jennifer Batchelder are planning a dedication ceremony for the north bench at the Labyrinth in Georgia's memory on Saturday, April 21. Attendees will be invited to honor Georgia's memory or the memory of their own loved ones by planting in the area. Steve will be available to work on the area from Monday 4/16 through Wednesday 4/25.

Labyrinth area -

In its current state, the area contains a 47' diameter labyrinth made of pavers with 3 benches sited to the north of a paved walkway, somewhat uphill from the Delaware Run floodplain with a mix of 2 dozen or so mature trees in various stages of decline. A mulched path about 50' long descends about 6 feet in elevation from the paved walkway to the east entrance to the labyrinth. The ground around the labyrinth and trees is a mix of turf grass, native and non-native mowable broadleaf plants (some would say "weeds"), and bare soil. Steve, his family and friends, and some members of the OWU and Delaware community planted 800 daffodil and 200 anemone blanda bulbs in around the edge of the labyrinth in the fall of 2017.

General layout -

Steve's plan for 2018 is to create concentric rings of vegetation to set off and define the labyrinth area. The rings would consist of 1) an inner ring of low-growing perennials extending out about 4' from the edge of the labyrinth and bench areas, 2) a walking path about 6-7' wide to allow access to the benches and to invite people to admire the area from different vantage points, 3) a ring of five broken island plantings 5-7' wide and from 10-20' in length consisting of shrubs and smaller, understory trees, underplanted with native ground covers, and 4) an outer ring of about a dozen larger trees that will eventually form a canopy and take the place of the existing mature trees that are in decline. These larger trees will be planted in their own islands with understory plants to protect root areas and trunks and to reduce damage from mowing.

Plant selection -

The majority of species will be native to Ohio and suitable for a shaded floodplain area. Some cultivars may be included to produce a more consistent growth pattern and to allow study and comparison between straight species and cultivars. Plants will be chosen to provide extended bloom time, resources for wildlife, and visual interest in all seasons. An appendix of proposed plants and sources for purchase will be attached.

Entrance path -

The current mulch path from the paved walkway to the labyrinth is not friendly to persons who may have difficulty walking. The grade of the path and distance would not be ADA compliant even if the surface were hardened. To reduce the grade, I would propose a future additional path be built from further east on the the paved walkway to the east entrance area of the labyrinth.

Walking paths -

Another future plan for the walkway ring around the labyrinth could include converting the proposed grass walking path ring to flagstones or a similar materials. Such stones could be arranged in patterns to create a set of meditation stations that replicate prayer bead patterns (57 for Catholicism, 99 for Islam, 108 for Buddhism) to encourage further meditative practice in the labyrinth area.

World stones area -

Chaplain Powers has expressed an interest in having students and alumni bring stones from their native lands to contribute to and decorate the labyrinth area. Whether this

begins as a small corner a few feet square or grows into a larger zen-garden approach, this concept should be considered in current and future plans.

Nearby areas -

The area involved in the immediate labyrinth area project measures about ¼ of an acre. In addition to this, there are approximately 2½ acres of floodplain or slightly upland area bordered on the north by the Delaware Run, the east by Henry St. and the Phillips Hall parking lot, the west by Sandusky Street, and the south by a walkway that extends from the Spring St. intersection and runs to Phillips Hall. Following are some observations and ideas for future projects of varying scope, cost, and complexity.

North of labyrinth - between stream and labyrinth.

- Additional naturalized plantings: In areas downhill from the labyrinth, consider converting turf grass areas to native plant areas containing large swaths of native species such as Virginia Bluebells, Jewelweed, ferns, solomon's seal, May apple, woodland poppy, spring ephemerals (trillium, trout lilly, dutchman's breeches, Spring beauties, etc.). Add shrubs and smaller trees to help stabilize the area, such as spicebush, ninebark, dogwoods, bladdernut, or pawpaw.
- Stream bank restoration, either rebuilding with block or creating a more natural form that still protects property and requires minimal maintenance.
- Pedestrian bridge across Delaware Run from S. Union. Chaplain Powers and the priest at St. Mary Catholic Church have talked about creating a pedestrian bridge across the stream.

East of labyrinth - east of the wall of tall conifers

- Current conditions: This portion, about 1.25 acres, is the lowest part of the area (elevation 856-858'), and it is reported to be "not infrequently flooded." On a recent visit in January of 2018 after some heavy rains I observed deposits of sand and shells from the Delaware Run. A variety of recent individual shrub and tree plantings dot the turf grass floodplain to the east of the labyrinth area. The south side of stream bank is becoming naturalized east of Union Street.
- Minimal planting strategy. As the stream bank is already becoming somewhat naturalized, it would be beneficial to re-introduce plants that are typically found in a streamside biome. (List to come.)

- It would be desirable to create a screen to reduce distraction from Henry St. This could be done close to the labyrinth, planting shrubs and trees on the higher ground near the wall of conifers. Or it could be done by planting taller, salt-tolerant and flood tolerant evergreens closer to Henry. If at some point the Phillips Hall parking lot is repaired, consider raising the elevation of the parking lot and bordering it with evergreens.

- Stream restoration. A more ambitious and more beneficial project would be to restore the stream bed, allowing it to meander south toward Phillips Hall and the Sulfur Spring. I believe preliminary plans have already been created, but the project has a lot of potential to create a living laboratory for students and to vastly improve the natural habitat of the area.

West of labyrinth

- Current Conditions: This portion, also about 1.25 acres, is highest in elevation where a pair of paved paths run from University Hall, dropping to cross the Delaware Run to reach Edgar Hall and a parking lot. The South side retaining wall for the Run emerging from under Sandusky near Edgar has failed but the wall is in fair condition between Edgar and Union St. Some ornamental fruit trees line a portion of the path from Edgar toward University Hall. Significant noise and visual distractions come Sandusky St.

- Minimal planting strategy. Consider a hedge of mixed shrubs (Aronias, bayberry, native holly, etc.) along the parking lot path to reduce visual distraction from Sandusky St. Underplant the ornamental fruit trees with native perennials to reduce maintenance, provide visual interest, and provide additional habitat for wildlife.

- Sound barrier option. Consider creating a soil berm running north/south at a high point between the Edgar and parking lot paths to block sound from Sandusky street.

- Stream restoration. Given the elevation of the area and utility concerns, this is probably not an area to consider for a stream meander. However, given that the bank is eroding and repair and maintenance are already necessary, restoration that mimics a more natural setting would be desirable. Rather than simple block or poured concrete, consider limestone boulders interplanted with native species.

Elsewhere on Campus - in the future

- SLU units. Artists renderings online show buildings with imaginative landscaping. On a recent drive past the buildings on Rowland I saw only turf grass. Are there plans for landscaping these? If so, I can help with ideas and resources. If there aren't plans for useful and creative landscaping, why not?
- Retention pond by Meeks Aquatic Center. Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed (FLOW) has grants available to "adopt a pond." This whole area has the potential to become a real showplace (even if it's off the beaten path).
- General plantings. I haven't been around campus much, but the tradition used to be to plant a lot of annuals for events (graduation, alumni weekend, homecoming, etc.). I would like to work with OWU to move toward more sustainable practices of planting native perennials that would still be showing at particular times but wouldn't require replanting every year. In addition, I'd be interested in working in coming years to promote more sustainable planting practices throughout campus, underplanting trees and shrubs with native ground covers, creating pollinator friendly and water-wise gardens.