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Botanic Garden plans \$250 mil. of new growth

The Chicago Botanic Garden has launched a nearly \$250-million, 10-year plan to expand amenities and beef up its endowment.

Led by President and CEO **Sophia Siskel**, the Botanic Garden will spend close to \$150 million to build a children's learning campus, extend its plant-production facility, reconfigure its entrance and parking lot and add a mile-long walking and biking path to existing Cook County Forest Preserve land along Lake Cook Road.



Sophia Siskel

Another \$100 million will be raised to put the garden's endowment on par with industry standards.

"We've tried to focus not on getting bigger but on maturing," Ms. Siskel says of the Glencoe garden, which draws nearly 1 million visitors a year.

"It's the difference between a very good restaurant and a restaurant that you

want to return to again and again."

It couldn't have been easy to win over 96 board members in the middle of a recession—while its 2008 annual report showed a \$1.5-million deficit, cost-cutting brought it back into the black in 2009—but Ms. Siskel was persistent. She eventually won unanimous approval.

"Sophia worked hard to bring together a variety of constituencies," says **Robert Finke**, vice-chairman of the board and a senior partner at Mayer Brown LLP.

Not to say she didn't do some convincing.

"It was about getting people to buy in to the mission and getting everyone to feel part of the process," says **Homi Patel**, former chairman and CEO of Hartmarx Corp. and a board vice-chairman.

The garden is gearing up for its 10th Antiques and Garden Fair this Friday through Sunday. By August, work will begin on the children's campus.

"We're taking it piece by piece," Ms. Siskel says. "It's a true 10-year plan."