



Royal
Botanical
Gardens

Annual Summary

2020



MISSION

We dedicate our expertise in horticulture, conservation, science and education to connect people, plants and place for the purpose of nurturing and preserving healthy growing life on our planet.

VISION

A world in which everyone is awake to the beauty, diversity and necessity of plants, and from that consciousness more actively works together to protect and preserve plant species and habitats and, by extension, our planet.

Role

Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) is the largest botanical garden in Canada, a National Historic Site, and registered charitable organization with a mandate to bring together people, plants and nature.

With the support of our funders, members, donors and volunteers, RBG's activities include:

- Protecting and restoring 2,450 acres of nature sanctuaries containing environmentally sensitive habitats where over 50 listed species-at-risk have made their home;
- Teaching the public and educating school children about the importance of plants and nature, and how to be environmental stewards in their community;
- Creating display gardens which beautify our regions' landscape and teaching people how to transfer best practices into their own backyard;
- Hosting events that celebrate our landscape and highlight our conservation activities (Fishway demonstrations, nature sanctuary guided tours, children's winter exhibits);
- Engaging in research projects and networks to pursue environmental sustainability;

These and other leadership initiatives could not be undertaken without the support of our funders, members, donors and volunteers.

Funders

Royal Botanical Gardens is funded by the people of Ontario through Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Regional Municipality of Halton, City of Hamilton, Royal Botanical Gardens' members, and many corporations, foundations and individuals.



Table of Contents

Mission, Vision, Role, Funders.....	2
Board Chair and CEO Message	4
Board of Directors	6
Strategic Direction.....	7
1. The RBG Guest Experience	7
2. Financial Sustainability.....	8
3. Environmental Leadership.....	8
4. Governance and Leadership.....	8
2020 – Performance Stats	10
RBG Targets and Results	12
Financial Performance.....	12
Sales and Attendance	12
Business Development.....	12
Sustainability Efforts	13
Mandated Activities	
Horticulture.....	14
Science.....	15
Natural Lands	16
Education	17
Winter Wonders.....	19
A New rbg.ca	20
Social Media Connections.....	21
Financial Summary – Risk Discussion.....	22
Financial Statements.....	22



With the support of the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, the Regional Municipality of Halton, City of Hamilton, as well as donors, partners, numerous volunteers and members, RBG continues to implement long-term strategies to ensure financial success while focusing on critical environmental initiatives and showcasing a world-class tourism destination.

Board Chair and CEO Message

As we all know, 2020 was anything but business as usual. Although there were many hurdles to overcome, Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) was able to swiftly adapt to the impacts of COVID-19, and in some cases, completely re-invent initiatives to keep our brand top of mind and continue to attract visitors.

Before the onslaught of COVID-19 our CEO, Mark Runciman, submitted his retirement notice. An executive search promptly began. The priorities of a five-year strategic plan and our 25-Year Master Plan were quickly replaced with operational business continuity plans and a re-examination of the programs, events and experiences we offer each year.

Outdoor gardens and nature sanctuaries as a main attraction allowed RBG to reopen in May in phase 2 of Ontario's reopening strategy, starting with the lilac collection at the Arboretum. Other garden areas followed as restrictions were lifted and we opened our buildings in early September.

General admission started to recover in June and surpassed 2019 during several weeks from June to September – primarily due to

the Come to Your Senses advertising campaign and the influx of visitors from outside the region looking for outdoor activities nearby. It became very apparent and served as confirmation that our community relies heavily on RBG to provide access to the outdoors — our areas proved to be a respite for people during the pandemic.

Many events had to be cancelled or had their capacity significantly lowered, which negatively impacted revenue. However, the events we did deliver sold out, including Pumpkin Trail, The Enchanted Garden and RBG After Dark.

Winter Wonders, a new holiday experience in Hendrie Park, was designed to increase our visitors' safety during COVID-19 restrictions and saw unprecedented levels of demand from visitors both locally and beyond. We successfully hit our attendance target within the first three weeks of tickets going on sale. Modeled after the 2019 Winter Lights at the Rock, we increased the number of operating dates and hours resulting in 25,000 visitors, an increase of 49%.

In education, demand for school programs came to a halt with the closure of schools and field trips did not occur even as schools re-opened. Our winter exhibit, *Wildlife Rescue* closed part-way through its 12-week run, however new initiatives like outreach fieldtrips in the schoolyard, and virtual day camps were valuable tests for future virtual programs.

Corporate and social events greatly declined however demand increased from wedding clients outside the region as indoor venues were able to open. Although new revenue lines such as live streaming were introduced, they did not mitigate losses in catering revenue.

Providing our guests with a legendary visitor experience remains a top priority. In 2020 overall visitor satisfaction improved by 3%, partly due to the care staff took to ensure visitor safety during COVID-19.

Overall key performance indicators in marketing remained stable and some metrics grew including RBG's social media audience and overall social media impressions. Contributing to the positive digital results were the launch of RBG at Home digital programming and a new website which greatly improved the user experience.

Although every effort was made to reach our goals and mitigate revenue loss, it was inevitable that we would see unprecedented declines overall in visitation, revenue, and memberships. 2020 was a year of mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and creating innovative new strategies that provided us with learnings that can be applied in the coming year.

RBG's Strategic Storyline and Master Plan, the foundation of future strategic plans, are aimed at taking RBG to a new level of performance, relevance and financial sustainability. The Board of Directors approved the Master Plan in May and we look forward to implementation beginning in 2021, starting with a five-year Strategic Plan.



Cliff Carson, Board Chair
Royal Botanical Gardens



Nancy Roland, CEO
Royal Botanical Gardens

Board of Directors

Clifford Carson – Chair
Keith Scott – Vice-Chair

Appointed by Council, City of Hamilton
Keith Scott (May 2015–November 2022)
Councillor Lloyd Ferguson (December 2018–November 2022)

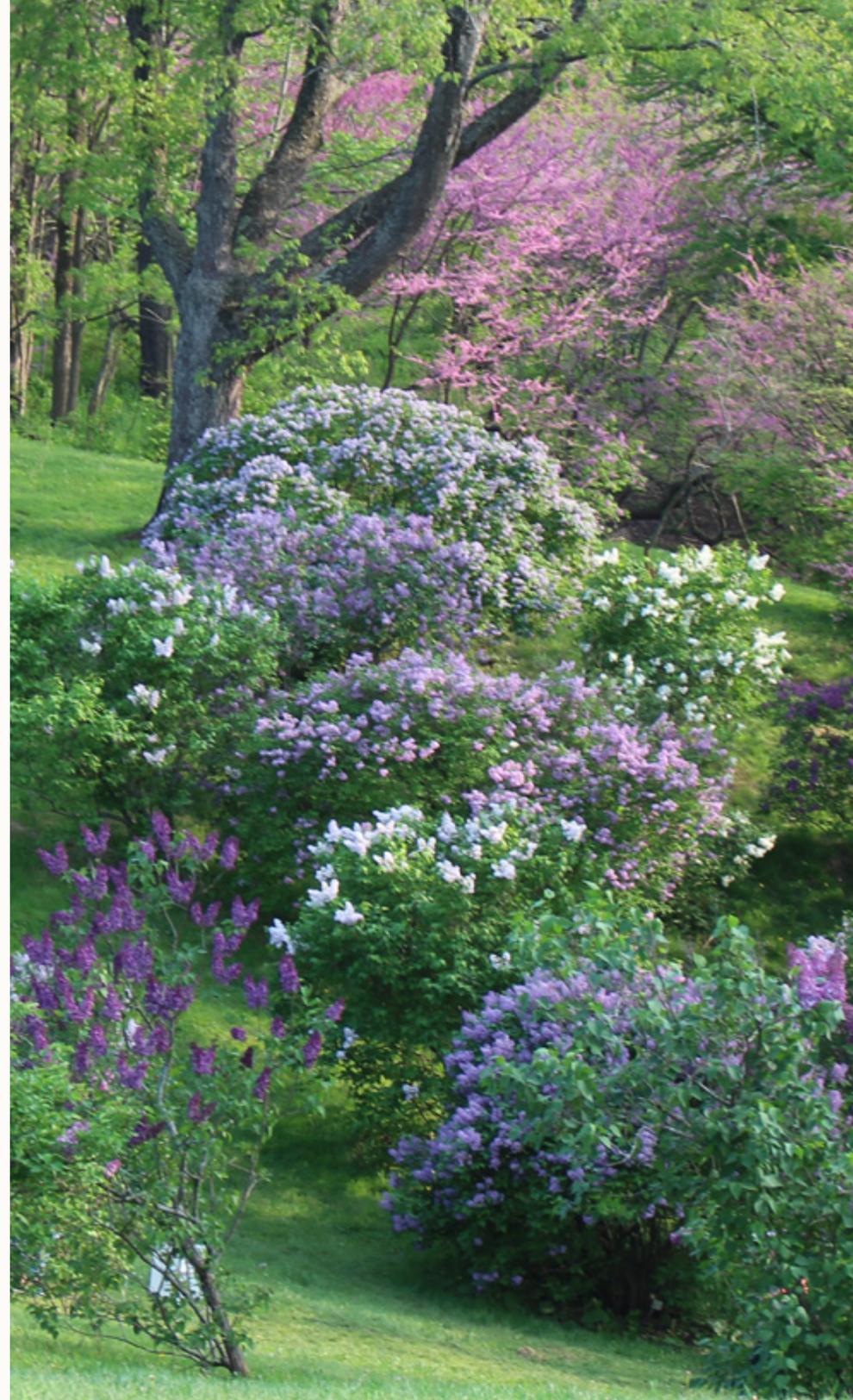
Appointment by Council, Regional Municipality of Halton
Larissa Fenn (June 2019–November 2022)
Councillor Kelvin Galbraith (December 2018–November 2022)

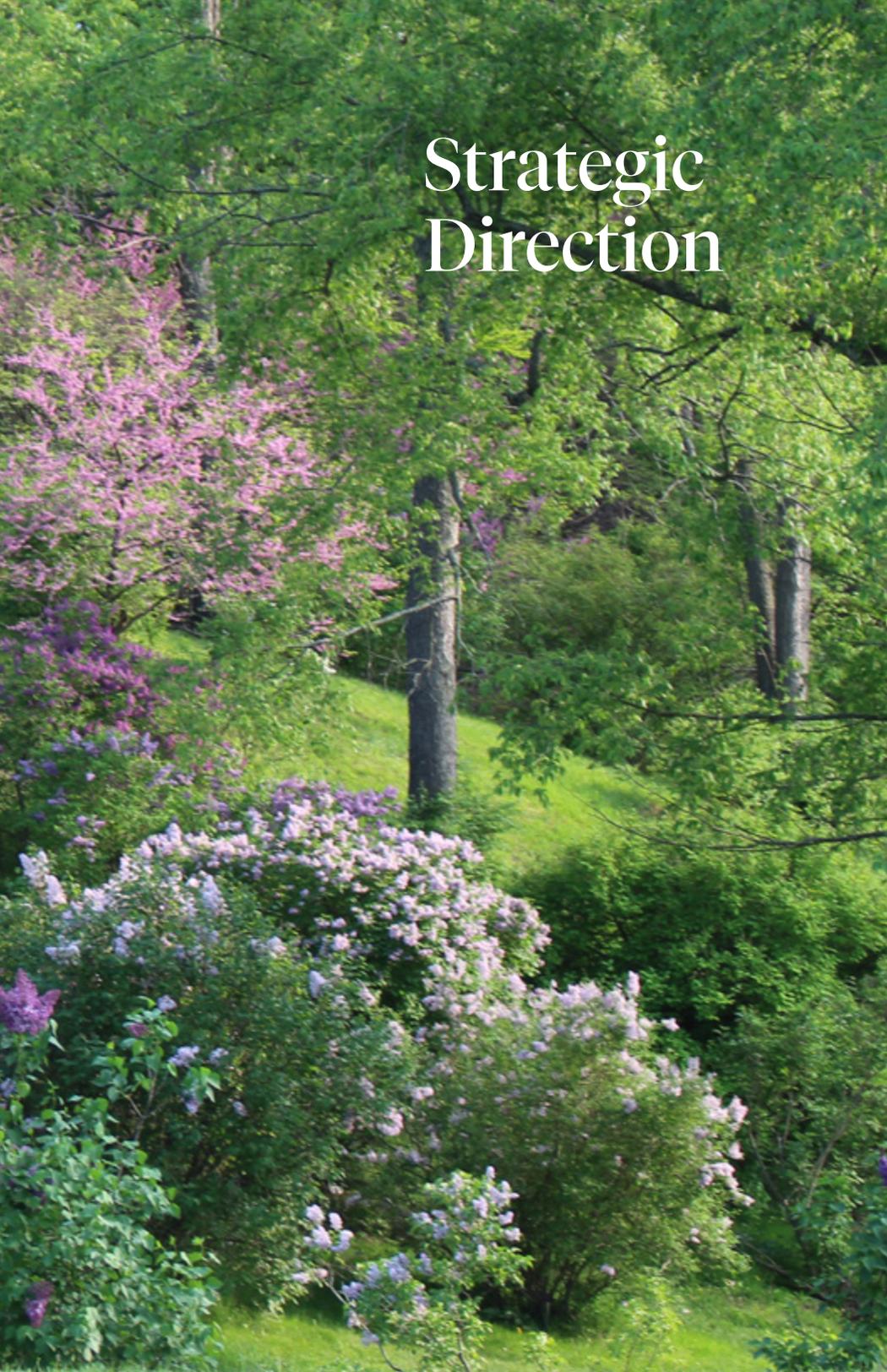
Additional Members in Place of Appointments by the Governor-in-Council
Kevin Brady (June 2013–September 2022)

Appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor-in Council, Province of Ontario
Alexandra Lawson (June 2020–June 2023)
Dan Muys (March 2020–March 2023)

RBG Appointees
Clifford Carson (September 2010–June 2021)
David Conrath (March 2015–June 2021)
David Farrar, President & Vice Chancellor, McMaster University
(September 2019–June 2021)
Ingrid Hann (May 2020–June 2021)

Representing RBG Volunteers
Fiona Morrison (May 2020–June 2021)





Strategic Direction

Royal Botanical Gardens' Board of Directors approved a five-year Strategic Plan late in 2014. Many initiatives carried on through 2020 as we extended the plan by one year to allow for completion of RBG's master plan. The new strategic plan was delayed further due to COVID-19, but RBG has acquired a facilitator and will begin work in early 2021 on a new strategic plan. The goals and actions listed below were all ongoing throughout 2020.

Strategic Priorities:

1. The RBG Guest Experience
2. Financial Sustainability
3. Environmental Leadership
4. Governance and Leadership

1. The RBG Guest Experience

Goal: Provide legendary guest experiences

Actions:

1. Provide a comprehensive customer service training program that results in a “wow” guest experience at RBG.
2. Implement a work schedule for the RBG team that will have team members consistently available to enhance the guest experience.
3. Create a complete and consistent signage and interpretation experience at all points of entry and throughout the RBG (including digital points of entry).
4. Obtain, analyze and consider guest feedback on an ongoing basis to assist in improving the guest experience.
5. Develop and implement an internal transportation strategy aimed at connecting the separate areas of RBG, giving guests options for moving around the property. This strategy would ensure guest parking availability and provide alternative accessibility options including but not limited to: transit, cycling, walking and arriving by car.
6. Research public transit opportunities with key stakeholders in our area to provide improved access for our guests.
7. Provide guest amenities to enhance the guest experience.

2. Financial Sustainability

Goal: Become financially sustainable by 2020, have sufficient revenue to achieve strategic goals

Actions:

1. Create new revenue streams for Royal Botanical Gardens. Leverage and enhance the existing land use plan to identify the next capital projects that should be undertaken over the next five years. For each project, develop a business plan which will include the feasibility of conducting a major capital fundraising campaign to cover capital costs.
2. Develop and implement an infrastructure renewal program for all assets of RBG in order to maintain facilities in a state of good repair.
3. Explore partnerships with the private sector and/or a university to leverage RBG expertise and physical assets in botanical and environmental science and research.
4. Identify surplus assets that should be sold.
5. Conduct an annual review of RBG businesses (activities) with a view to improving long-term performance.
6. Develop and implement a comprehensive donor strategy.

3. Environmental Leadership

Goal: Take leadership on environmental stewardship and education locally, provincially, nationally and internationally.

Actions:

1. Create a comprehensive communication plan around environmental issues and climate change.
2. Secure key partnerships that build on the laboratory nature of RBG's natural lands, species resources and scientific expertise (intellectual property).
3. Demonstrate leadership in environmental stewardship by continuing to focus on operating in an environmentally responsible manner in everything we do.

4. Governance & Leadership

Goal: Maximize all human resources (the RBG Team) to support the strategic directions of our RBG.

Actions:

1. Define the structure and composition of the Board of Directors.
2. Determine the need for a separate fundraising arm or alternative option.
3. Revise the organizational structure to facilitate the implementation of the strategic plan.
4. Transition from a Management Board to a Governance Board.
5. Put a succession plan in place for critical management and Board positions.
6. Provide key information to RBG staff, members, guests and the public.
7. Maximize the involvement of the Auxiliary in the new strategic directions.

Many of the above-noted actions are complete. We wish we could move faster on each one, however, the lack of resources has many of the actions as "add-ons" to individual staff member responsibilities where they really need dedicated attention.

That said, some strategic achievements that moved considerably are:

- RBG's 25-Year Master Plan was completed and approved by the Board in May 2020.
- A customer service plan was developed and rolled out to the organization in 2019. This included full training of all RBG staff which will serve the organization well for years to come.
- A new RBG Brand has been developed.
- A succession plan has been developed.
- The Auxiliary of RBG was officially dissolved in 2019 and RBG's volunteers are working within the organization. The number of volunteers has grown ever since with diversity and excitement.
- A Climate Change Resiliency Plan has been rolled out.
- Several new partnerships have been established to assist with self-generated revenues.

It should be noted that some of the goals and actions contained in the plan align with the Ontario government's key priorities such as investing in infrastructure, improving quality of life for families and prudent balanced-budget plans.

RBG's organizational structure continues to evolve. RBG continues to be more customer-focused as with the aim of providing a high-quality tourism and cultural experience for the people of Ontario and visitors to Ontario.

RBG continues to review its significant programs as it strives to achieve efficiencies, maintain properties, provide desirable visitor experiences, invest in revenue-generating and value-added activities, all while meeting a very diverse and important mandate for the people of the community, the Province of Ontario and beyond.

As the major cultural attraction in the region, RBG plays a key role in improving the quality of life, increasing pride and economic growth in our community, and is a major biodiversity hotspot of provincial and national importance.

Royal Botanical Gardens will continue to have an important economic impact on the community as it strives to grow and promote itself as a significant cultural attraction with an important environmental mandate in the Province of Ontario.



Rose-breasted Grosbeaks is one of dozens of migratory bird species that nests in our forests.

RBG in 2020



188,449
people
visited RBG



16%
of visitors
were
tourists



450,000
trail visitors



277 bird species
37 mammal species
6 amphibian species



350
trees and
plants planted
in the
natural areas



5 acres of
restored
wetlands



50,000+
invasives
removed

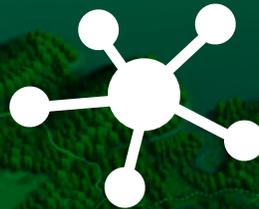


62 fish species

Sustainability Award

RBG was awarded Sustainability Leadership's 2020 Environmental Initiative Award for our **Scented Garden Permeable Pavers project**.

This award recognises a member of the Sustainability Leadership Program who has implemented an initiative that has a significant positive impact on the environment in 2020. Our project was up for consideration among four other great projects which you can read about in Sustainability Leadership's digital annual report and award summary: [Sustainability Leadership Awards](#).



7 plant identification workshops
13 public presentations/talks
2 papers accepted or published
24 EcoPark System partner and community meetings
42 users of RBG's new seed library



21,000
volunteer hours



490 active
volunteers



1,137,385
online educational
engagements via
RBG at Home

10,765

virtual field trip
attendees, plus

73,854 onsite
visitor educational
engagements



9,887 plant accessions
312,594 living plants representing
7,192 taxa representing
157 families,
824 genera and
2,485 species

Green Angels

7 onsite school groups = **360** students
63 virtual field trips = **1,566** students
420 children and youth visited RBG
through day passes and membership

Garden Areas

Rock Garden

RBG's oldest garden embraces sustainable trends in garden design and management while respecting the integrity of its heritage setting. This ever-evolving garden features mature conifers and specimen trees/shrubs, underplanted with a diversity of perennials that provide wide sweeps of colour and texture through the seasons. Attractions in the garden include a visitor centre, café, courtyard, water features, strolling paths, and historic Garden House.

Arboretum

Arboretum features more than 500 species and cultivars of lilacs as well as magnolia, crabapple, cherry and redbud collections, avenues of trees, a pinetum and a range of unusual tree and shrub cultivars.

Laking Garden

This garden includes an amazing diversity of Iris and peonies, a heritage garden, clematis collection and perennial beds with season-long interest.

Hendrie Park

Noted for its collection of modern, disease-resistant roses in the Rose Garden as well as the Scented and Morrison Woodland Garden, Helen M. Kippax Garden and Veggie Village.

RBG Centre

The interior is noted for its Mediterranean Garden, tropical plants, living wall, orchid collection, atrium and a gift shop and the Greenhouse Café. The exterior features a diversity of perennials, trees and shrubs, street tree collection, escarpment garden, courtyard plantings and colourful seasonal displays of bulbs and annuals.

Mediterranean Garden

Two-storey indoor garden featuring plants from the world's five Mediterranean climate zones that have interesting adaptations and uses.

Targets and Results

Financial Performance

Due to COVID-19 revenue was 17.9% below target and 20.4% below 2019. RBG received \$2.5 million in Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) funding to mitigate further losses.

Sales and Attendance

COVID-19 had significant impact on attendance figures and revenues as the Gardens was either closed or operating under various gathering restrictions throughout the year. Revenues from sales and admission decreased by 58% over 2019, while overall (non-trails) attendance decreased by 48%.

While attendance figures were well below 2019 levels and 2020 targets, we were proud to attract 188,449 visitors amidst a series of COVID-19 lockdowns, cancellations and restrictions. As gathering restrictions loosened, we were able to host another sold-out Great Pumpkin Trail event as well as create a new holiday light attraction, Winter Wonders, that resulted in a 49% increase in attendance over its 2019 counterpart, Winter Lights at the Rock Garden.

Business Development

Membership and Donations – Revenues were 8.4% over target. Membership decreased significantly due to COVID-19 at 35% under budget and the year concluded with 10,931 memberships (representing over 18,400 members).

Major gifts and Legacy Giving came in at 128% over budget thanks to an unexpected estate gift which makes up 58% of received revenue in this department.

Significant efforts will be placed on renewing lapsed members and donors in 2021, due to the impacts of COVID-19 in 2020.

Sustainability Efforts

RBG continued to improve sustainable day-to-day operations and focused on reducing water consumption, greenhouse gas use and waste diversion. 2020 results included:

Greenhouse Gas Emissions And Energy Reduction

- Natural gas-powered boilers were replaced at RBG Centre and in the greenhouse structure at the Arboretum with new units resulting in reduced natural gas consumption
- RBG purchased its first fully electric fleet vehicle for use by the natural lands department.
- A 2-kW off-grid solar power system was installed at the boathouse located in the Arboretum. This allowed an old powerline that was running along a section of the nature sanctuary to be removed.
- A 6-kW solar power system with battery storage capacity was installed at RBG Centre.

Water Reduction

- In 2020 we added advanced monitoring and control functions to the irrigation systems at RBG Centre, Hendrie Park and Rock Garden that allows for remote activation and flow monitoring.
- 2020 marked the second year of significant reductions in water consumption, in part as a result of our monitoring efforts. In 2020 we used 8,280 m³ less water than in 2019, which was already a 5,431 m³ reduction in water consumption from 2018. Of course, reduced visitation and on-site events no doubt played a role in our 2020 water consumption savings.

Waste Reduction

No major waste reduction projects took place in 2020. Overall, our efforts to further improve our waste diversion rate were negatively impacted by the amount of cleaning supplies (masks, paper towel with chemicals, gloves) that were added to our landfill stream as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scented Garden Permeable Paving

A new permeable surface installed at Hendrie Park's Scented Garden helps manage stormwater runoff by allowing precipitation to flow into, and be temporarily stored within the ground on site, instead of converging on a storm water drain. Most permeable paving projects use impermeable interlock pavers that direct water to permeable gaps in-between the bricks. Our solution features permeable recycled ceramic bricks and permeable gaps between bricks so the entire surface of the Scented Garden lets water drain through to the soil.

Horticulture

In keeping with our department's operational goals, horticulture contributed to improving our guest experience in collections and display gardens both in-situ and ex-situ during the COVID-19 pandemic. Written contributions were made to the RBG at Home series. A Rose Garden video was created for the American Public Gardens Association 2020 virtual Lunch and Learn series which aired online. An article was contributed to the new *Passion for Peonies* book which references RBG's collection as one of the best in North America. Collaborative work was completed with the International Lilac Registrar on register format and lilac cultivar identification. Staff continued to serve as garden experts on CBC's *Ontario Today* garden chats.

Within RBG's gardens and structures, a total refurbishment of RBG Centre's living wall feature was completed, and major pruning of the Mediterranean Garden collection commenced during the winter. Polyhouse #5 was re-sheathed with new poly, roof vents were repaired, and louvres were installed to improve air flow. Metal benches were purchased to improve plant health and a small sampling of paper pots was purchased for trial to assess this alternative as we evaluate ways to decrease our dependency on some types of plastic pots. Over 2,000 grasses were grown for the natural lands department for use in habitat restoration projects.

Two new *Amorphophallus titanum* plants were added to our greenhouses – a generous gift from the Niagara Parks Commission. Historically important Cherry trees (*Prunus* sp.) were propagated both in-house and off-site at a partner nursery. The 2020 rose cultivar performance trials were accomplished with the help of RBG volunteers who completed a total of five evaluations. Rose donations were received from an area nursery and the Foreign Trade Counselor of Luxembourg, Toronto/GTA, Canada. Research commenced on sawfly and Japanese beetle controls in our Rose Garden in a collaborative effort with a horticultural supply company.

Planted in the gardens and collections:

19 trees

936 perennials

30,488 perennial bulbs

totalling 31,443 plants of 100 taxa

8,500+ bulbs in Hendrie Park

5,800+ bulbs in Laking Garden

16,000+ bulbs in Rock Garden

In addition, 2020 was the most productive year in recent history for hazard tree mitigation, preventative pruning and proactive arboriculture practices within our cultivated spaces. Without the necessity for contracted arborists to deal with impacts from significant storm events, RBG was able to focus their efforts on the completion of outstanding hazard tree mitigations and to provide proactive work on trees which had not been worked on for years. A total of 24 days and over 480 hours of work was performed on 144 of our cultivated trees, and 17 trees were removed.

A total of 2,863 volunteer hours were spent working in our outdoor horticultural gardens this past year. In addition, volunteers contributed 143 hours within our interior glasshouse spaces and 117 hours were reported from our Memorial Watchers group. Finally, numerous volunteers spent 161 hours on other projects, such as assisting with plant inventories and plant collections information gathering.

Natural Lands

Record visitation to the natural areas challenged sustainability. Ongoing redevelopment of the trail system saw the completion of multiple lowland trail upgrades to facilitate use during high water conditions. In addition, multiple catchment features were added at strategic points to reduce trail erosion during heavy rains, including a complete reconstruction of the Hickory Valley Trail. At Princess Point, large-scale erosion was mitigated by a rebuilt shorelines and a new lookout platform, in addition to general trail surface upgrades to accommodate heavy four-season usage.

Lake Ontario water levels returned to average by end of summer, however the dry conditions that facilitated this decline resulted in concentration of the remnants of the Chedoke Creek spill, created dense algae blooms in the marsh. This resulted in further decline of the marsh ecosystem. At the same time several large interior ponds had various invasive species issues resolved and are showing excellent signs of recovery, including substantial new growth of Wild Rice. Coastal marsh restoration continues to receive financial support from Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Upland conservation projects were diverse and featured Churchill Parks pit and mound reforestation (supported by McNally and SC Johnson Foundations), and a large-scale new meadow restoration initiative. A three-year meadow restoration project, supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, included the retiring of agricultural fields on our Escarpment Properties, the propagation of native grass species, and a large-scale invasive grass species elimination program in the Spencer Creek delta of Cootes Paradise. Early returns on this effort include nesting Bobolink and localized recovery of multiple native wildflower species.

Turtle conservation received support from the federal Habitat Stewardship Program with wildlife barriers being further extended along Cootes Drive, and with planning initiated for Plains Road by Hendrie Valley. In addition, a clutch of Blanding's Turtle hatchlings was placed into a Head Starting program at Georgian Bay Turtle hospital with financial support from the Hunter Foundation.



Science

As was the case for all of RBG, 2020 became the Year of the Pandemic a quarter of the way through. Faced with the rapid shift to working from home in March, we came up with new ways of managing existing projects, protecting and accessing large collections, and creating new content for RBG at Home and other media.

Among the positive changes during the year was production of online courses in plant identification, publishing over 20 new blogs on RBG's website and through social media, and the launch of RBG's own seed library, with a lot of help from dedicated volunteers. We also brought in remote digital monitoring of temperature and humidity for our herbarium and archives, so that environmental conditions could be checked remotely, and if necessary, action could be taken to protect the collections. Botanical work in the nature sanctuaries continued on important research to control invasives and protect endangered species under appropriate conditions of out-door social distancing.

We're in the midst of long-term plans to upgrade our archives, library, and herbarium collections and didn't let COVID-19 slow us down. We have renovated storage for RBG's large collection of nursery trade catalogues and other historical horticultural archives, bringing in a new movable shelving system and increasing storage space by 50%. This project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada. The same grant has helped us move forward with digitizing collections by allowing us to develop a new high-resolution, high speed digitizing camera system for the herbarium. In 2020 we also launched an institution-wide research project for a new digital asset management system.

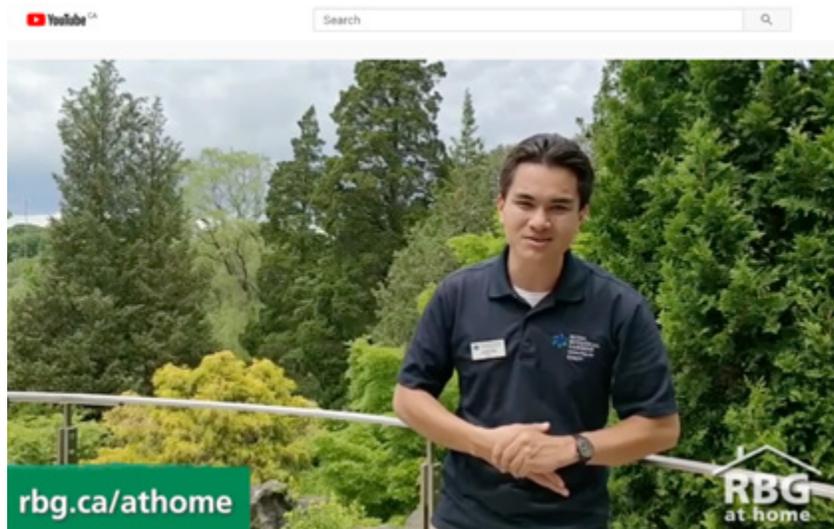


We also made significant progress in 2020 on the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System. This included completion of a new 2021–2030 Strategic Plan and presentation of the draft plan online for public input. With the support of the Greenbelt Foundation we completed an exciting wildlife corridors mapping project, part of our Sustainable Growth and Climate Resiliency in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (SONC) Project that will continue in 2021. While the COVID-19 emergency interfered with the plans of many visiting researchers during 2020, we were able to renew RBG's Memorandum of Understanding with McMaster University for another five years.

Education

As was the case everywhere, adaptation was the name of the game for education in 2020. We kicked the year off normally with the mid-January launch of our winter exhibit, *Wildlife Rescue*. As the weeks rolled on and COVID began its global spread, we adapted exhibit operations and cleaning protocols up until the pandemic lockdown sent us all home.

Within days of the lockdown starting, our talented team of educators was hard at work adapting our program delivery and taking it all online. We took our phones and filmed (in our backyards, kitchens, city parks, and later, onsite at RBG), we reworked activity guides, brainstormed new topics, and explored relevant themes and ways to engage people of all ages. Our new RBG at Home platform launched April 2, providing parents and teachers with a growing range of nature/plant-based videos, activity sheets, lesson plans and more. As the infographic shows, we built a very large online audience in a very short time.



12 highlights of RBG at Home in 2020

April 2 through to December 31 2020



Contributions from 20+ staff and volunteers



375,000+ social media engagements



Over 45,000 website visits to rbg.ca/athome



An entirely new offering available online for everyone



Over 300 donations made in support





88 videos with over 715,000 views



Over 45 delicious recipes with 7,000+ views



Over 135 activity sheets and outlines with over 20,000 views



48 free interactive video learning programs (VCs) with 2,385 attendees



100+ blogs and educational articles with 26,000+ views



Plus de 10 vidéos et 15 activités sont disponibles en français ou bilingues



At the same time, our well-established (since 2007) videoconference-based programs saw a rapid rise in demand, especially once teachers settled into remote teaching. For RBG, this is an area where the pandemic has had a silver lining. While we've been delivering award-winning programming using Zoom and other online videoconferencing apps for several years, their unfamiliarity to educators has been a barrier when it comes to expanding our program base. Fast-forward to year-end, and Zoom had become a regular and crucial part of the daily experience of people in many areas of the world. The global familiarity with this platform has allowed us to leverage its capacity far beyond meetings, to deliver day camps, public lectures and a wide range of our continuing-education courses. As a result, we've been building new remote audiences and will be continuing this diversified delivery even after the pandemic fades away.

While we started 2020 without onsite field trips due to a provincial directive, we ended the year with unprecedented demand for their virtual counterparts and, for the first time, local schools became a major consumer of these programs. This was largely due to a generous COVID program subsidy offered through RBG's Green Angels Fund. We've also been able to expand our French offering thanks to Canada/Ontario French Language Service funding, and NSERC helped to support programs across Canada including those in remote communities across the North. In September, we were informed that RBG had been recognized as one of the top 15 videoconference-based program providers globally, based on our years of glowing reviews from participants around the world.

In all, close to 10,800 participants took part in virtual field trip programs, a record that we will no doubt surpass in 2021.

WINTER WONDERS

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, the events team was able to adjust and offer engaging outdoor experiences when restrictions loosened. These include The Enchanted Garden, Rock at the Rock, and the ever-popular Great Pumpkin Trail.

The Winter Lights at the Rock experience was moved from the smaller Rock Garden and transformed into Winter Wonders at spacious Hendrie Park, allowing for safe admission of more visitors than ever before.

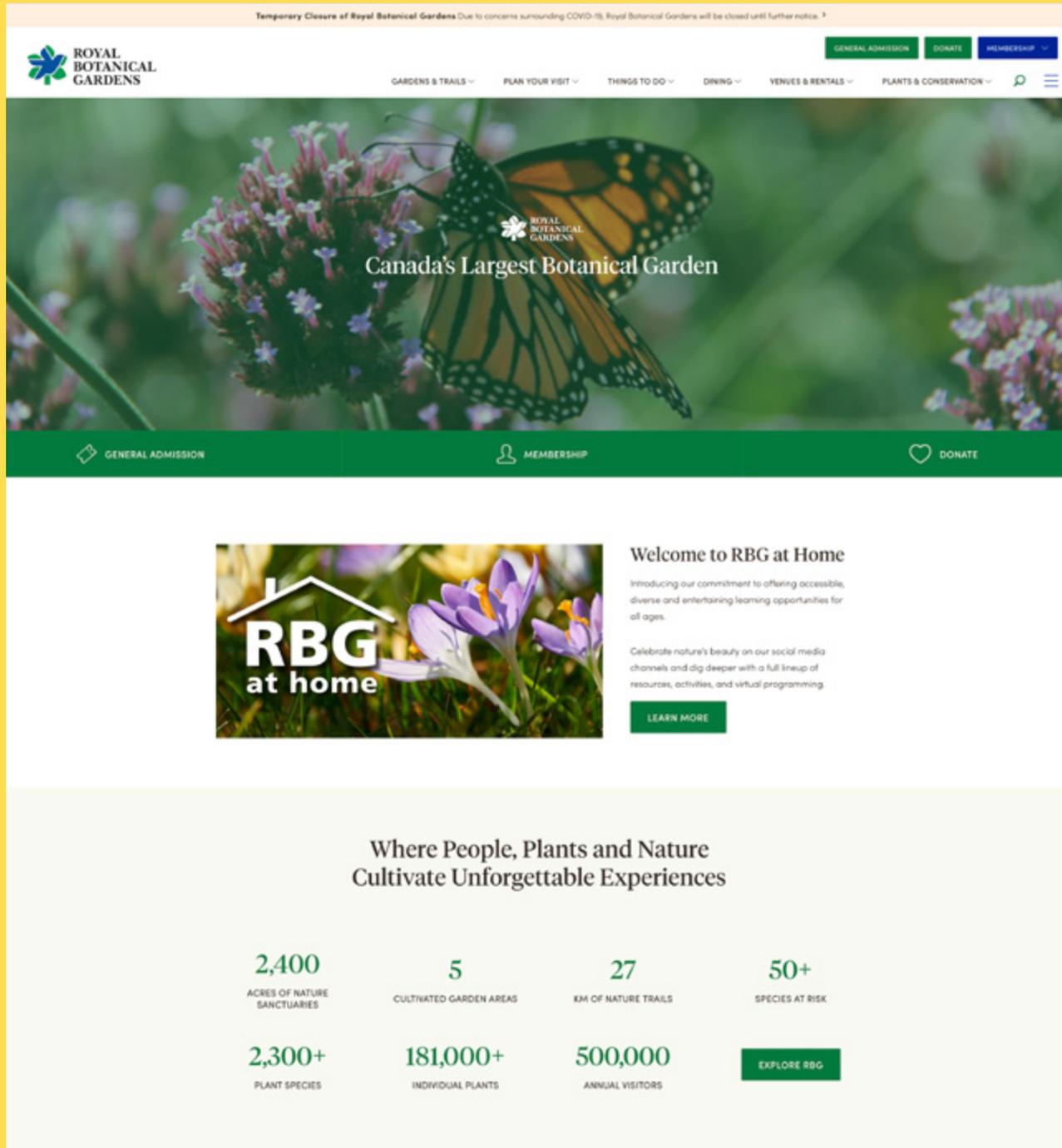


A significant
increase
in tourism
(40 km+)



49% increase in
overall attendance



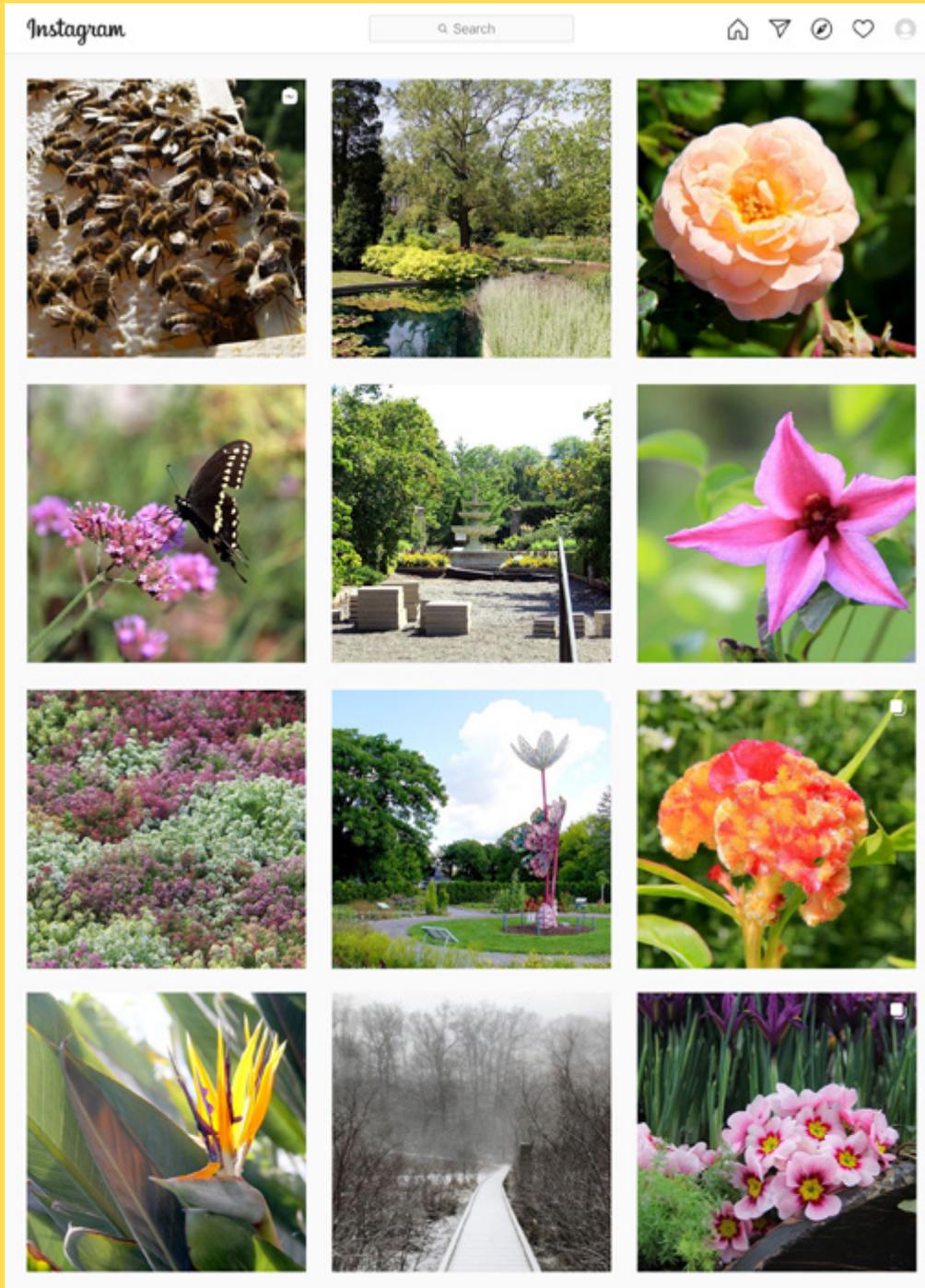


A New rbg.ca

In May, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Royal Botanical Gardens launched new and improved rbg.ca, designed so users could better connect to the beauty of our gardens from their smart phone, tablet or desktop in a brand-new way.

The new website boasts improved navigation and a colourful new design so visitors can tailor their own unique experience from all RBG has to offer. Whether our visitor's passion is plants, cultural events, your own special event or simply connecting to the great outdoors, the new rbg.ca serves as a roadmap in planning that next adventure.

Despite a reduced operating season due to COVID-19, website page views increased by 8% over 2019.



Social Media Connections

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and as soon as RBG was able to open its doors to the public again, the Gardens continued to connect people to its landscapes and plant collections through a strong social media presence.

RBG's strong social media following continued to grow through the COVID-19 period and 2020 across all social platforms, with a few outstanding increases.



42% increase in followers,
38% increase in engagements
on Instagram



243% increase of
YouTube views



19% increase in engagements
on Twitter



20% increase in engagements
on Facebook

Financial Summary

Risk Discussion

Risk is evaluated regularly and reported and reviewed quarterly by the Audit and Finance Committee. The reports include a description of the risk, an impact and scope description, likelihood of the risk, mitigation strategy and overall risk assessment. The risk mitigation involves development of mitigation strategies designed to manage, eliminate or reduced risk to an acceptable level.

**ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS
(A Corporation without Share Capital)
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2020**