

Lights, camera, blossom! Disney films inspire floral fantasy

February 27 2015, byKathy Matheson



Workers make preparations for the Philadelphia Flower Show, Thursday, Feb. 26, 2015, at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia. The horticultural extravaganza is scheduled to run from Feb. 28 to March 8. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

(AP)—Lights, camera ... blossom! Floral and garden designers are paying homage to Disney and Pixar films at the Philadelphia Flower Show, which opens Saturday with the theme "Celebrate the Movies."

Meticulously landscaped exhibits have been inspired by more than a dozen features, from "Frozen" and "Finding Nemo" to "Cars" and "Cinderella."

Visitors enter through a huge, art deco theater facade as if they were attending a red carpet premiere. Palm trees, roses and lilies help recreate the ornate interior of a 1920s movie palace, while moss, jewels, fabric and other blooms cascade down from "chandeliers" overhead.

Billed as the nation's largest and longest-running flower show, it covers 10 acres and dates back to 1829. Organizers hope this year's family-friendly theme will help a new crop of gardening enthusiasts establish roots at the annual extravaganza, which runs through March 8.

"Introducing that new generation, that younger generation to the flower show is something that we want to do," said Drew Becher, president of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, which sponsors the show.

Children and adults alike will surely recognize the large orange clownfish in the exhibit by J. Downend Landscaping of Ridley Park, in the Philadelphia suburbs. With a boat suspended above the display to mark the "water line," workers created a dry version of Nemo's world with petals and leaves shaped like creatures such as seahorses, jellyfish and stingrays.

"The idea is to create an underwater seascape using all landscape plants that would be found from Florida to Maine," said designer Tom Morris. "We've got hardy, tropical, annual, bulbs and everything in between."

In another tableau, headlights shine from rusted vehicles seemingly embedded in an overgrowth of ferns, all surrounded by flowering cherry trees, whitespire birches and white and pink azaleas.



Roses are displayed as workers make preparations for the Philadelphia Flower Show, Thursday, Feb. 26, 2015, at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia. The horticultural extravaganza is scheduled to run from Feb. 28 to March 8. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

"We just loved the movie 'Cars.' Our kids loved it ... my brother and I are car buffs. So it was a natural fit," said Kevin Burke of Burke Brothers Landscape Design/Build of Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania.

The horticultural society is hoping for a big box office—at least 240,000 people, which would be about 10,000 more than in 2014. The floral fantasia serves as the organization's biggest fundraiser, taking in about \$2 million to help fund a range of local programs.

The event features plant judging, a butterfly garden, interactive exhibits and craft workshops. New this year is "Fido Friday"—an evening when

guests can bring their dogs.

In keeping with the cinema theme, John Wayne's son Ethan Wayne will attend Saturday and display some of his father's memorabilia. Actor Dan Aykroyd will make an appearance March 6.

The flower show comes just in time for a region that can't seem to thaw out from a brutal winter. Philadelphia has indeed been "Frozen"—the average temperature for February has been a measly 25 degrees, according to preliminary figures from the National Weather Service. That's about 10 degrees below normal.

"Having flowers blooming in the beginning of March in the Northeast is a challenge in itself," said Sam Lemheney, who oversees the show. "Our experts and our growers here do an amazing job of turning this place into spring every year."



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Lemheney worked as a horticulturalist at Disney's EPCOT Center in Florida before coming to Philadelphia. The flower show's local TV partner, WPVI, is an ABC affiliate owned by Disney. A Disney representative did not immediately return a request for comment.



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If You Go...Philadelphia flower show: Opens Saturday and runs through March 8 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, 12th and Arch streets, Philadelphia. General admission tickets range from \$15 for children to up to \$32 for adults, depending on the day and point of purchase; packages also are available. Details and hours can be found at www.theflowershow.com.



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