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Conn. Science Center opens rooftop garden

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The 144,000 s/f Connecticut Science Center at 250 Columbus Blvd. has opened its "green" Rooftop Garden for the 2012 season. Thanks to sponsor Northeast Utilities, the 6,300 s/f Rooftop Garden is the perfect space for visitors to experience native plants and green rooftop architecture.

Northeast Utilities executive vice president and chief administrative officer, David McHale, and director of environmental & property management, Srividya Madhusudhan were on hand at the Science Center to present a \$25,000 gift in support of the green space.

The Science Center is a green LEED-Gold certified building. Having this healthy ground cover on the roof insulates the building, making it more energy efficient. The rooftop deck has been planted with grasses native to the Connecticut area. Because the garden uses local flora, it allows the plants to thrive while also reducing the irrigation needed by 50%.

"We are excited to partner again with the Connecticut Science Center on an innovative, new learning environment," said McHale. "This incredible transformation of a rooftop space into a serene and scenic garden well represents Northeast Utilities' commitment to our communities and the environment we share."

Planned enhancements this season include a new water feature, seating, the creation of a Rooftop Garden Map & Guide, and enhanced signage. Using high-powered binoculars, visitors can get a new outlook on the area surrounding Hartford, including the Connecticut River. This provides a perfect tie to the "River of Life" gallery, located on the same floor. Visitors can discover the creatures that live in the waterways, study the way that the water shapes the landscape, and then head outside to view the scenery for themselves.

With a view over the Connecticut River on one side and Hartford on the other, the garden brings together ecology and green architecture..

Staff scientist Thomas McKenna has recently added more than 350 plants to the Rooftop Garden. "The thinking behind the design of the Rooftop Garden is to see it as an extension of our galleries; an 'outdoor gallery.' It features a unique set of growing conditions that allow for many different types of plants to all grow within one garden," said McKenna. "Because of these conditions, we are able to incorporate many different zones in the garden - a shade garden, an alpine garden, a children's sensory garden and even a section that uses xeriscaping to reduce the need for additional watering."

One of the more emotive aspects of the rooftop area is known as "Michaela's Garden," in the North plot of the space. The Petit Family Foundation planted Four O-Clock flowers, which are offspring from flowers originally planted in Dr. William A. Petit Jr. and his youngest daughter Michaela's garden at their home. The seeds that fall from these flowers, which visitors pick up and place in a repository sculpture in the garden, are then re-packaged and sold to raise funds for the Petit Family Foundation. Among other endeavors the foundation pursues, it encourages girls to pursue careers

in science fields.

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