

B E T S Y C A M P B E L L L E C T U R E

Matthew Ross, Executive Director, The Botanic Garden at Historic Barns Park

Beauty Is Therapy

A scene of Victorian elegance, waves swirling in a reflecting pool, undulating rows of tropical plants, and cows grazing in the distant pastoral landscape. This may not be what you imagine you would've found on the grounds of The Northern Michigan Asylum at the end of the 1800's. This was the vision of a young psychiatrist with a passion for horticulture, James Decker Munson. From its roots as a sanctuary at the turn of the century to its new life as a botanic garden, explore the plants and design of this 27-acre botanical garden that reflect the philosophy that Beauty is Therapy. With a strong emphasis on native plants and environmentally functional selection, the cultivation of the once abandoned Northern Michigan Asylum is a testament to the power of plants to build community and enrich lives.

Photo Credit: Nicole Geri Photography



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Saturday, October 24, 2026

Marvin and Betty Danto

Lecture Hall 10:30 am

Lecture is free

*to guarantee a seat please
register online or call ticket office.*



Matthew Ross is the Executive Director of The Botanic Garden at Historic Barns Park in Traverse City Michigan. He oversees the 26-acre Botanical Garden which was founded by visionaries Kurt and Karen Schmidt and a team of volunteers on the site of the Northern Michigan Asylum Farm. Prior to coming home to Michigan, Matthew was the Director of Continuing Education at Longwood Gardens, a college instructor at Owens Community College, and chief Horticulturist at Toledo Botanic Garden. He is a proud graduate of Michigan State University where he received a bachelors and master's degree in Horticultural Science with an emphasis on Landscape Design Construction Management and Urban Forestry respectively. He is a well-respected public garden professional that spends his spare time kayaking, hiking, and exploring the vast landscape of Northern Michigan.

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