Imo’s bridge >>

What a beautiful place, and most people in Baton Rouge don’t know it exists. But a planned expansion should provide LSU’s Hilltop Arboretum with a higher profile, while letting it teach more people how to make their gardens grow.

The arboretum is 14 acres hidden on Highland Road between Siegen Lane and Bluebonnet Boulevard. Donated by Emory Smith, a postal worker who lived with his family on the property, the arboretum has ponds, native plants, a bridge, an open-air pavilion and offices.

There will be more, for the Friends of LSU Hilltop Arboretum have already raised $1 million toward a $1.8 million campaign to add an enclosed building, a second bridge and an outdoor courtyard. The building was part of the original plan, but funding was difficult to secure.

Before she died last year, Imo Brown, through the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, provided a $500,000 gift toward the bridge and building. Her donation started a new round of fundraising aimed at completing the original plan. Other donors of the Foundation, including founder John Barton, Sue and Bert Turner and Dudley Coates, donated to the building as well.

Cathy Coates, president of the Friends of the Hilltop Arboretum nonprofit, says the building will be a multipurpose education facility with a catering kitchen. “And it will be LEED certified.”

Brown’s funds will pay for a bridge to cross a ravine and start a path around the property. Other Hilltop donors, former LSU Chancellor Paul Murrill and wife Nancy, have provided $28,000 to build a path on the property.

Construction of the projects could begin early next year.

“When we make this a destination site, that’s when we sit back and relax and enjoy the show,” said Peggy Davis, executive director of Hilltop. •

Indicators Phase II >> A donnybrook was avoided, but the final community meeting of the Foundation’s indicators project produced some spirited debates over an unlikely topic—which statistics should be used to measure the quality of life.

At the gathering of 70, some got carried away, ignoring the instructions to pick more than the requested five indicators for topics to be measured. It’s OK to be exuberant, for the project, named Baton Rouge CityStats, will produce an important result...