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Windmill Island Gardens Celebrating Another Record Year

One of West Michigan’s most popular attractions is once again celebrating record-setting attendance. After breaking a decades-old record in 2021, Windmill Island Gardens has eclipsed last year’s mark with several weeks left in the 2022 season.

After opening in 1965, the Dutch-themed park and gardens experienced attendance peaks of around 122,000 in 1972 and 1988. In 2021, pent-up demand from the pandemic led to a very busy summer as the park welcomed over 131,000 guests. This year kicked off with a bang as nearly 75,000 guests visited during the nine-day Tulip Time festival. With a steady stream of summer visitors, park manager Matt Helmus estimates a final visitor count will be around 140,000. He cites a marketing approach that is “coordinated with community partners such as our visitors bureau and focused on our summer and fall seasons” as key to drawing more visitors.

Over the last few years, staff at the park has focused on enhancing the visitor experience by refurbishing current exhibits and adding new garden areas and attractions. Examples include themed annual gardens, updated interpretive signage, a permanent grove of larger-than-life tulip sculptures carved from oak trees, a pollinator garden in conjunction with the local MSU Extension, and more.

While daily operations end on October 2, the park will re-open on weekends through October 16. Part of the extended season includes hosting an artisan market during [Holland’s Fall Fest](#) on October 7 and 8. Admission during the extended weekends is \$5 for adults, with kids visiting for free. During this time grounds staff is busy pulling annual displays and beginning to plant tens of thousands of tulip bulbs in preparation for next spring.

Staff is also busy finalizing details for the first ‘Magic at the Mill’ winter exhibit. The ticketed event will take place Friday and Saturday evenings from December 2 through December 17. The centerpiece is a ‘tulip field’ of 1,000 LED blossoms displaying a synchronized light and music show. “Imagine if Holland’s tulip festival and Grand Haven’s musical fountain had a baby,” says Helmus. The windmill and park grounds will be lit up, and attractions such as the carousel, street organ, and shops will be open. There will also be an opportunity for kids to greet Sinterklaas (the Dutch predecessor of Santa Claus) along with snacks and beverages. Tickets must be pre-purchased with information found at windmillisland.org.

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About Windmill Island Gardens: Windmill Island Gardens offers a small slice of the Netherlands in West Michigan. The park features tours of ‘de Zwaan’ – America’s only authentic, working Dutch windmill. Other highlights include an Amsterdam street organ and children’s carousel among many Dutch replica buildings and exhibits. During Tulip Time in May, visitors can delight in 100,000+ tulips in beds and fields. A proud member of the American Public Garden Association and American Horticultural Society, the Island is transformed each summer with a beautiful display of annuals and perennials found in themed beds and throughout the landscape. Visitors can enjoy it all from mid-April to early October each year.