



Florida Master Gardener Awards of Excellence Entry Form

ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY AUGUST 1, 2015.

County	Bay County	Project Name	Margaret K. Lewis School Gardening Program
Project Start Date	August 2013	Project End Date	ongoing
Project Master Gardener(s)	Judy Stevens, Janet Psikogios, Dee Jones, Vicki Wahl, Dena DiFilippo, Norm Shiver, Michele Rigdon		

CATEGORY: Indicate only one category per entry form. You must assign your entry to a specific category to be considered for an award in that category. Entries are limited to the categories indicated below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Beautification	<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Communications
<input type="checkbox"/>	Demonstration Garden	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Service to 4-H and Other Youth
<input type="checkbox"/>	Educational Materials Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diversity
<input type="checkbox"/>	County Displays/Exhibits	<input type="checkbox"/>	Communications
<input type="checkbox"/>	Newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>	Outstanding Master Gardener Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Outstanding Master Gardener**	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Review the applicable category entry form for exceptions to the general submittal rules above.

Below completed by the County Master Gardener

I approve the submittal of this project: Margaret K. Lewis School Gardening Program		
Julie B. McConnell	<i>Julie B. McConnell</i>	7/31/15
Master Gardener Coordinator Printed Name	Master Gardener Coordinator Signature	Date

Please complete and return this entry form in PDF form by **August 1, 2015** to Wendy Wilber.

Margaret K. Lewis School Gardening Program

Program description: Margaret K. Lewis is a school for approximately 140 exceptional (special needs) youth (pre K-18 years old) located in Panama City, Florida. A gardening project was started in August 2013 to provide therapy and assist youth in developing life skills. Some have profound physical motor skills challenges, others are sensitive to soil and are afraid to touch it or become dirty, and others are challenged by the thought of trying new things or by being able to stay on task to complete a project. Seven Master Gardeners partnered with Bay County 4-H, Bay District Schools, Bay County Farm Bureau, Panama City Women’s Club, Let’s Talk Dirt, Springfield Nursery, Habit for Humanity, and Eastern Shipbuilding Group. Master Gardeners included: Judy Stevens, program leader responsible for planning, organizing, and implementation; Janet Psikogios, administrative and technical computer support and led activities; Dee Jones, Vicki Wahl, Dena DiFilippo, Norman Shiver, and Michele Rigdon provided assistance to youth as needed during activities. After reviewing Individual Education Programs (student needs) with teachers, the MG leader and staff identified skills that gardening could improve (gross and fine motor skills, opportunities for sensory exploration, confidence and self-esteem, patience and increased responsibility). MG volunteers contributed 631.5 hours and traveled 648 miles supporting this program between August 2013 and July 2015. Activities from Florida Ag-in-the-classroom and the Junior Master Gardener were used. Technical assistance was provided by Julie McConnell, Horticultural Agent, and Paula Davis, 4-H Youth Development Agent.

Program goals included: 1) to teach youth gardening skills, 2) to enable youth to recognize elements for plant growth, and 3) to help youth understand that food comes from farms not the grocery store. Youth participated in gardening activities during 80 school days. They prepared the planting sites, planted vegetable seeds and seedlings, maintained the gardens, harvested the produce and assisted in the preparation of their harvest. Youth also learned about gardening tools and safety. They learned to identify weeds and helped maintain the school Memory Garden. Weeding provided an opportunity for youth to explore soil and plant parts while developing gross and fine motor skills. Youth also learned about wildlife including the life cycle of frogs and butterflies. Activities have been done both in classroom and outdoors. To date there are fourteen 4x4 feet beds and eight 2x4 feet wheelchair accessible beds. To achieve mastery, some of the activities have included hand-over-hand for youth with physical limitations.

Community partners were a valuable part of this project. The following table identifies partners and their role. In addition, seven community volunteers contributed 92 hours.

Organization	Role	Dollar amount/value
Bay County Master Gardeners	Plant/seed donations; gardening supplies including fertilizer, irrigation supplies	\$500
	Funding for supplies	\$1046.83
Bay County Farm Bureau	Grant funding	\$498
Ag-in-the-classroom	Grant funding	\$1000
Panama City Women’s Club	Donation	\$500
Let’s Talk Dirt	Soil donation	\$90
Springfield Nursery	Plants donation	\$55
Eastern Shipbuilding Group	Designed and built 4 wheelchair accessible planting tables	\$4300

Organization	Role	Dollar amount/value
	Designed and built 20 raised bed boxes	\$7500
Home Depot	Seed donation	\$1031
TOTAL		\$16,520.83

Note: Because this is an ongoing program, all funds have not been spent. Current funding will support a planned fall vegetable garden. There are also plans to expand the butterfly and herb gardens.

This program was publicized in two articles in local newspapers and the training session for other afterschool programs was publicized for after school volunteers on the county extension website and posted on social media.

Outcomes/Impacts: Youth participating in this gardening program have developed patience, improved responsibility, and increased their self-confidence. These activities enabled youth to gain a sense of pride and accomplishment by participating and succeeding in gardening. Youth are proud of their harvest and have shared it with all youth, teachers, staff and a visiting group from the Czech Republic. Garden activities provide opportunities for sensory exploration and practice of inquiry. The physical nature of gardening especially engages students who have trouble sitting still and concentrating in a traditional classroom setting and helps to build gross and fine motor skills. Gardening skills can translate into job skills later in life or become a life-long hobby providing relaxation and recreation. It also is a way to earn praise and recognition for accomplishments as youth have been recognized for their participation in this program during school monthly award ceremonies.

Participants (32) were evaluated using pre/post-test. A tool identification test was developed to determine if youth knew names and purpose of various gardening tools showed a 63% improvement (pre-test score 95, post-test score 155; total possible 195). Ag-in-the-Classroom *On the Discovering Florida's Growing Treasures* test, youth had a 175% improvement (pre-test score 100, post-test score 276; total possible 416).

Participating in this program has positive benefits for the youth as can be seen from the following leader/teacher observations:

- After several months in the program, an elementary school student who couldn't focus on lessons at the start of the school year loves to show off her ability play the plant parts game.
- Initially, several of the 5-7 year olds didn't want to touch soil. Three months into the gardening project, they made a row and planted carrots and radish seeds.
- A middle school student that wouldn't touch soil in October planted a Bay leaf tree and chocolate mint in the herb garden within months of participating.
- Since the implementation of Positive Behavior Support (PBS), behavioral problems with some students has been greatly reduced. One example is a student who had extreme anxieties, aggression and felt the need to run away and avoid school activities. He is now motivated to stay engaged in school activities because he can go outside and participate in gardening. This results in less stress for teachers and administration and increased educational opportunities for the student.
- Youth sensitivity to soil must be overcome before they can garden. Initially many would not touch soil even with gloves. Now the majority have their bare hands in the soil. They thrive to

shovel and use a wheel barrow. They are excited about going outside. Teachers are using the garden as a PBS because the youth place great value on going out with the Master Gardeners.

- An example of motor skill success story is a wheelchair bound student considered profound (meaning not mobile and has very limited use of body). This girl was able to reach in the garden, grab the soil and bring it to her face. She had never shown an ability to grab soil or much else before - a very exciting breakthrough according to the teachers.
- Another student would not touch soil due to sensitivity issues is now planting without gloves. He also mulches, weeds and has started his own garden off site with adult guidance. He harvested eggplant, squash, peppers and tomatoes that he is now willing to eat because he grew them. In the past he would not consider these vegetables an acceptable part of his diet.
- A student whose parents are migrant workers has overcome extreme shyness using the garden as a vehicle for expression. Before the program, he was extremely shy and relatively uncommunicative. He is now vocalizing his needs and has found common ground using kinesthetic learning.
- 93 students learned how to plant seeds and seedlings, water, identify the difference between weeds and desired plants and pull weeds. All students participated but approximately 45 students participated via hand over hand because of their limited mobility.

Because of their garden success, Habit for Humanity requested assistance with landscaping two homes. Youth helped plant the front beds using plant material they propagated and additional donated plants. This program was also selected as a training site for other after school garden programs. Eleven after school 4-H leaders from five sites attended the training observing the garden design and irrigation system.

Program Challenges/Lessons Learned: These youth have special needs that provided some unique challenges while implementing the program. Although tools and designs for plant beds are readily available for horticulture therapy, acquiring these tools is not always easy. Finding tools that the youth could handle with their limited range of motion was overcome using light weight tools and by volunteers using hand-over-hand instruction for some students. Additional challenges included: acquiring wheelchair accessible durable beds and planting tables, identifying and training volunteers to work with special needs youth, and developing and implementing evaluation tools.

Executive Summary: A gardening program was started at MKL School for special needs students. Gardening is a vehicle students can use throughout their lives. These youth have many physical and mental barriers they struggle with daily: sensitivity issues, motor skill development, and engagement are three that this program addresses. The garden provided opportunities for sensory exploration while the physical nature increased activity and developed motor skills. Gardening also provided opportunities for youth to demonstrate behavioral change. These skills can translate into job skills or become a life-long hobby. Youth became more receptive to healthy eating as they ate their harvest. Through this program, youth know that farmers produce food not the grocery store, understand that plants need key things to grow as they showed responsible behavior, and have a positive outdoor related experience. Youth exhibited improved independence and mastery by developing patience, improving self-confidence, and demonstrating responsibility by growing plants.

Support Documents



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District 4

Steve Moss
District 5

To Whom it May Concern:

July 27, 2015

This letter is informational and serves to support and describe the Gardening Program at Margaret K. Lewis School. M.K.L. is a center school meeting the academic and functional skill needs for students with disabilities and serves approximately 150 students.

Two years ago Judy Stevens, master gardener and former Bay District employee, had a vision to bring gardening education to our school. It started with seeds taking root in paper towels to a full blown garden today that boasts twenty gardening boxes located behind the school. Students are engaged in every phase of the gardening process. On any given day you will find Ms. Stevens working directly with students and hand-in-hand with staff members to plant, weed, water and harvest. Judy volunteers countless hours to instill in our students a love of gardening. The students harvest a spring and a fall crop. From the garden to the table, our students learn to appreciate home grown fruits and vegetables.

The gardening program continues to grow as the vision embraces even more opportunities for students to become involved in important life skills training embedded with an academic framework that includes content areas like math and science. We look forward to another successful year of gardening at Margaret K. Lewis School.

Sincerely,

Lori Hast

Deborah Dixon

Margaret K. Lewis School in Millville
203 N. East Avenue Panama City, Florida 32401
(850)-767-1792
“Home of the Eagles”



7/27/15

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a high school teacher at Margaret K. Lewis School in Panama City, Florida. We have developed an excellent gardening program as part of our science curriculum. This program began at a volunteer level by Judy Stevens, a master gardener, and retired Bay County School District employee.

The gardening program has truly made a difference with our students with autism, as well as the students with other disabilities. The students look forward to planting, growing, harvesting, and eating the crops they grow and take great pride in their gardening skills. We have some students who have sensitivities to different textures, also not wanting to get their hands dirty, but with some effort on the staff's behalf, nearly 100% of them are now able to touch and smell herbs and get their hands into the dirt without using gloves.

Our gardening program is growing year by year, and we are looking forward to larger raised bed areas to expand our crops, a bird sanctuary, larger herb and butterfly gardens and a worm farm. The program has become very successful and I am excited about the continued opportunities to support the science and gardening education of the school's students with disabilities.

Sincerely,
Rita Carlson

July 27, 2015

Dear Judy and Bay County Master Gardeners,

I would like to thank you for yet again opening my son Adam's life up to new and exciting experiences in gardening. It was so helpful to have the garden on the Margaret K. Lewis School campus this year. You and his teachers were able to teach hands on lessons about the life cycle of a plant, the importance of being responsible and to enjoy the fruits of the harvest with the entire school.

The on campus garden was beneficial academically for my son as he learns best from doing an activity like digging in the soil and putting the seed in the earth. Watering the plant and seeing up close the progress as the plants grow and mature into lush and viable food. You and the teachers were able to apply the hands on experience into more tangible classroom science lessons.

Giving Adam (who has Down Syndrome) the responsibility of tending to a garden is very empowering. He is able to physically engage in the process of the life cycle of a plant. He enjoyed being assigned the tasks of weeding, watering and harvesting the plants.

Socially Adam benefited learning that it takes team work to tend the garden with chores of weeding, watering and feeding the plants as they grow. After he and his classmates harvested the variety of vegetables they worked together to wash and cook a meal to share with everyone in the school.

I applaud Judy Stevens and the staff at Margaret K. Lewis School for offering this gardening program and hope that it will be offered again in the upcoming school year.

Sincerely,

Davenie A. Deutsch

Parent of Adam Deutsch, Student at Margaret K. Lewis School



Some of the vegetables grown.



irrigation, raised beds, how to keep youth engaged while participating in outside gardening activities.



Youth planting being assisted by hand-over-hand



Youth getting hands dirty as he prepares soil prior to planting



Youth planted loofah in recycled containers using the palm tree as the trellis.

Local & State **B**

PANAMA CITY NEWS HERALD
THURSDAY September 26, 2013



Garden of Learning

Special needs students grow through agriculture

By JACK McDONALD
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PANAMA CITY — A special needs school in Oklawaha plans to cultivate responsibility and education within its community garden.

Margaret K. Lewis Exceptional Education Center is introducing about 90 percent of its students to an agricultural and gardening program and plans to plant its own community garden. Leaders of the program said the act of planting a seed and watching it grow allows for a wide range of educational opportunities.

"It's a great way to go through and say you are responsible for this part of the garden," said Phil Smith, principal. "Along the line they see what was just out or something you put in the ground become a beautiful flower or plant."

SEE GARDEN | B3



Photos by ANDREW WARDLOW | The News Herald
Azrofi Morris helps Master Gardener Judy Stevens "build a bug" Tuesday at Margaret K. Lewis School in Panama City. Top, Stevens helps Cody Blankenship plant a bean as Cameron Erskine watches.

Airport OKs 2014 budget; passenger numbers dip

By VALERIE GARMAN
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WEST BAY — As the fiscal year draws to a close, Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport is starting down its first year of passenger declines since opening in 2010.

With that in mind, the airport board approved an operating and capital budget at a meeting Wednesday, which outlines a modest passenger increase of 1 percent for the 2014 fiscal year, a 14 percent increase in operating expenses and a projected 3.4 percent increase in revenues.

Higher operating expenses for the upcoming year will come from increasing salaries and benefits, purchased services and materials, specifically fertilizer and soil additives for the airport's ongoing turf management plan.

Despite decreases in traffic, airport director of administration Pam Henderson said staff has been able to hold the line on expenses in 2013.

"We've held our expenses to only 57 percent of what was budgeted," said Henderson, citing savings in financial and professional services, airfield and grounds maintenance and personnel. "We've managed to keep the airport operating with a bit less staff and keep those costs down."

SEE AIRPORT | B3

Callaway signs off on sidewalk project

By JACQUELINE BOSTICK
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CALLAWAY — Callaway city commissioners on Tuesday approved a contract with the Florida Department of Transportation for new sidewalks to be installed in its town center area.

At the regular commission meeting, commissioners unanimously approved an agreement with FDOT for a sidewalk project, which calls for 5,260 feet of sidewalk to be installed from 11th Street to State 22, along the west side of Tyndall Parkway.

FDOT will fund the entire project and Preble-Rish is contracted to engineer the project. Designs are slated to be complete by December 2014.

Larry Johnson, director of public works, called the project "much needed."

Also at the meeting, commissioners heard from several residents supportive of a land-use change from residential to commercial requested by Callaway resident Harold Mangum concerning his parcel at 7306 Cherry St.

Mangum's request was not supported by the city's Planning Department staff, however, the city's Planning Board — an

SEE CALLAWAY | B3

Publicity

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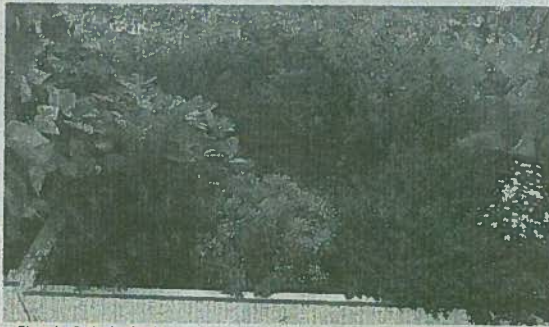


Photo by Catherine Davis

GARDENING

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her passion for gardening to the school to share with the students”.

Judy is quick to share credit with the 4H and Extension Office who have provided outstanding support for the gardening program. She confides that she cherishes the opportunity to work with the students and teachers at the school and thinks of them as family. Not long ago, the gardening program was simply “bean seeds placed on wet paper towels to begin to sprout roots”. From here, Judy has worked with

members of the school to evolve the program to include several raised gardens and pots of loofahs in the courtyard of the school. “The ability for students to use their sense of touch in the gardens has allowed many of them to overcome fears and discover talents they did not know they had” stated Principal Lori Hast.

The team at Margaret K. Lewis plans to sell produce from their gardens and to ultimately make and sell soap to accompany the loofahs they are growing in order to use the proceeds to sustain their gardening program and the magic it is providing to their students.

name of Judy Stevens bring

Continued on page 21

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