

**MASTER
GARDENER**
UF UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

107 Mehrhof Hall
PO Box 110675
Gainesville, FL 32611-0675
Phone: (352) 273-4521
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<http://mastergardener.ifas.ufl.edu>

Form 20

FLORIDA MASTER GARDENER SPECIAL AUDIENCES AWARD

Forms must be **TYPED AND COMPLETED** for consideration by the committee. **Remember to submit Form 10 with your entry.** Entrants are limited to the category they indicate on that form and must follow the Form 10 guidelines.

Special adult audience Category (check **all** that apply):

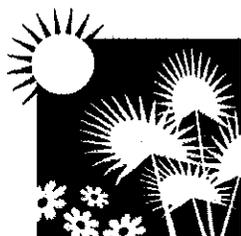
Handicapped Senior Citizens Low Income Minority
Inmates Other (explain audience **Veterans**)

Type of Project and Brief Description (example: Planning a community garden for Old Town Retirement Center): ...
Honor Center Gardens - Gainesville VA Domiciliary - Alachua County. Creation of a healing garden for veterans as risk of homelessness,
and on going programming with the veterans to provide therapeutic horticulture, life skills, and employment opportunities.

Attach a short summary (**not more than 2 pages**) which includes the following information (along with this form and Form 10). You may also include any supportive documentation (newspaper clippings, photos, etc.) with the body of the entry by scanning materials and packaging them into one PDF document.

1. Situation (background information which prompted you to do the project -- describe the problem, who all was involved with the project) Please provide a listing of all Master Gardeners who participated in this project. (10 points).
2. Objectives (Purpose of the project and what you hoped to achieve) (20 points).
3. Methods (How did you accomplish the project? What did you do, and what supplies, equipment, funds were needed to do the job?) (30 points).
4. Results/Impact (What was the impact of the project? How did it help the audience? What did they learn or accomplish?) (40 points)
5. A 150 word (or less) summary of your project so that we can let others know of your accomplishments. Your application will NOT be judged without this summary included.

Please add a few paragraphs describing any problems you encountered or things you might change if you were to do the project again.



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Form 10

Florida Master Gardener Awards and Recognition Form Awards of Excellence

Each county is allowed **ONE ENTRY PER CATEGORY**. Although your Master Gardener Coordinator may have been heavily involved in this effort, only the efforts of the Master Gardeners themselves are to be evaluated. Points will be deducted if it is perceived that most of the effort or submission of entry forms came from the Master Gardener Coordinator.

Only efforts made since the last awards ceremony will be considered by the judges. Any new or re-certified active Florida Master Gardener(s) are eligible. In the event your entry does **not** take top honors in this category this year, we would encourage you to improve your submission and resubmit your entry next year should you *repeat or continue* this project. If your project has won in **ANY** year, it **CANNOT BE RE-ENTERED** again, despite any significant changes in format or participants.

Judges for the awards shall be appointed by the State Master Gardener Program Leader, University of Florida. Decisions by the judges will be final.

ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE SUBMITTED IN ELECTRONIC FORMAT

SEE BELOW FOR APPLICATION CRITERIA:

The correct and completed award application forms including:

- A typed application form not to exceed 3 pages in length. Supporting materials (where requested may be additional pages)
 - The three pages must include the 150 word project summary.
- 12 point font
- No more than 8 photographs in addition to the three pages of text. (Photos no larger than 8 x 10)
- This form typed and completed including: appropriate category checked
- Name of MG Coordinator (The coordinator must approve application prior to admission)
- Application, photos and supporting materials must all be in PDF format and packaged into one document. Submissions are to be emailed to: twichman@ufl.edu

County: Alachua
 Name of Project: Honor Center Gardens - Gainesville VA Domiciliary - Alachua County
 Project start date: Summer 2009 Project end date: on going 2012
 Name of person(s) typing application: Lesley Fleming
 Name or names of Master Gardeners preparing application: Lesley Fleming, Leah Diehl, Greg McGann
 Name of Agent: Wendy Wilber

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"/> Form 11 Beautification | <input type="checkbox"/> Form 18 Personal Communications |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Form 12 Demonstration Garden | <input type="checkbox"/> Form 19 Service to 4-H and other youth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Form 13 Educational Materials Development | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Form 20 Special Audiences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Form 14 Extension Awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> Form 22 Written or Verbal Mass Comm. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Form 15 County Displays/Exhibits | <input type="checkbox"/> Form 23 County Master Gardener Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Form 16 General Achievement | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Form 17 Outstanding Master Gardener | |

Email PDF Applications to:

Tom Wichman
twichman@ufl.edu

TO BE ELIGIBLE ALL ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY AUGUST 1, 2012

FLORIDA MASTER GARDENER SPECIAL AUDIENCES AWARD 2012

NOMINEE: Honor Center Gardens - Gainesville VA Domiciliary - Alachua County

Type of Project and Brief Description:

A garden was built by master gardeners. The creation of the Honor Center Gardens has improved the lives of homeless and transitional veterans by creating a healthy green space for both active and passive interaction with nature. The three component parts of the garden - café garden, kitchen garden, and sanctuary garden - provide a continuum of experiences which enrich veteran's lives physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The Honor Center Gardens have become a platform for expanded life skills programming for recreation, nutrition, and therapeutic horticulture while also improving the physical facilities at the Gainesville VA Domiciliary. This therapeutic landscape would not exist had it not been for master gardener efforts.

1. Situation:

The Gainesville VA Domiciliary, created in 2009, provides shelter and services to 40 homeless veterans of both genders. Recreational, outdoor space is very limited and when materials for raised beds were donated, the therapeutic garden was launched. Staff member Alee Karpf, HTR, MS, CTRS, a retired master gardener, enlisted the expertise of master gardener/landscape architect, Leah Diehl. They began discussions for creating a healing/enabling garden to support the programs and services available to the Gainesville "Dom" residents. Because of the magnitude of the project, planning and implementation have occurred over a four year period with master gardener involvement critical to the success of each phase.

Master gardener Leah Diehl designed the master plan for the outdoor space in 2010. Implementation and construction of the Honor Center Gardens began in fall of 2010 with MGs Leah Diehl, Bobby Hammer, Greg Mullaley, Greg McGann, and Fred Fey fundraising, sourcing and constructing. During 2011, the same group of committed master gardeners implemented phase II of the Gardens' master plan with the same dedication. Fundraising and community involvement were easier to secure by the same group of dedicated master gardener because of the noticeable progress made in 2010. The Honor Center Gardens would not have been built had it not been for master gardeners leading, working and interacting with the special audience of veterans.

2. Objectives: To improve the lives of veterans by building a therapeutic garden for both physical and psychological healing

- To build the Honor Center Gardens, a 145'x38' garden adjacent to the VA Domiciliary buildings
Phase II implementation of the Garden's master plan occurred in 2011
Phase I was implemented in 2010, also as a master gardener driven project

3. Methods: From Nov. 2011- June 2012, master gardener activities have included:

- **Implementation of Phase II - Master Plan for Honor Center Gardens**- Led by MG Leah Diehl, this collaborative process included veterans, VA staff, Extension Agent W. Wilber, master gardeners, and other stakeholders who worked side by side to create a decorative fountain (which masked street noise making sanctuary garden more restorative), reconstruction of 10 raised vegetable beds, completion of fence (whose unique design provided for privacy, intimacy and air flow), and the final pour of cement for the café garden.

- **Selection and installation of plants and hardscapes** –Veterans were included in the process of plant selection, including visiting nurseries, making plant choices, preparing beds, and planting trees, vegetables, and flowers. The installation of fencing, raised beds and fountain were collaborative efforts.
- **Beautification of existing VA property** – The implementation of the Gardens’ master plan has increased the aesthetic and real estate value, while providing a healthy and safe sanctuary for veterans and staff
- **Interaction with veterans** – MGs interacted with veterans from the inception of the garden planning process through each phase. This was deliberately planned to provide physical and cognitive opportunities for veteran participation in construction, decision-making, and group socialization. During 2011 master gardener/(social worker) Greg McGann conducted weekly hort therapy sessions with veterans and master gardeners working on site interacted with veteran population.

4. Results/Impact

A brand new garden has been created because master gardeners cared about homeless veterans and their future. The establishment of the Honor Center Gardens exists, despite its lack of capital to finance it, as a result of MGs seeking and securing donations and providing professional services and labor themselves. It was cleverly designed to provide three distinct areas, each serving a different purpose. Consequently, the **impact on veterans** has taken many forms.

“I sat in the garden today for four hours to collect myself and find peace of mind.”

As a therapeutic landscape, veterans have used the garden to grow food, nurture, meditate, socialize, learn, and rejuvenate. Veterans have reported increased levels of self-esteem, confidence, pride in work, desire for self-sufficiency, and ability to function in a variety of settings. The effects of using the garden, both passively and actively, soothe those who are suffering from psychological trauma, and many have reported feelings of increased calmness. The Honor Center Gardens have become a platform for expanded life skills programming for recreation, nutrition, and therapeutic horticulture while also improving the physical facilities at the Gainesville VA Domiciliary. This MG project has made a point of involving veterans in each phase of its planning and implementation, providing meaningful activity for homeless heroes. About 100 veterans have been part of the crew creating the Honor Center Gardens, at least 150 veterans have actively used the garden (planting, growing, harvesting), and another 100 have enjoyed passive activities. Participating nurseries have indicated a desire to hire veterans trained at the Honor Gardens. The positive outcomes are expected to increase as the garden matures and more veterans move through the facility and participate in its programs. Research on the effects and health outcomes of the garden is planned.

Additional results include: improved staff moral - staff use the healing garden and have been inspired by the initiative; positive publicity for the VA and Dom; training opportunities for MGs in therapeutic horticulture; and improved support for other therapeutic gardens at VA facilities following the success of this initiative. MGs indicate that this has been a life changing, meaningful volunteer activity which will result in their long-term commitment.

5. Summary

Alachua County Master Gardeners have created the Gainesville VA Domiciliary Honor Center Gardens, a therapeutic, productive, and healthy green space which provides for active and passive interaction with nature. Designed by MG Leah Diehl to include a café garden, kitchen garden, and sanctuary garden that together provide a range of experiences, it has become an effective alternative setting for those who have served our country and now suffer psychologically as well as physically due to combat and other military related trauma, as well as subsequent life traumas. At least 250 homeless vets have used the garden since its

beginning. The Honor Center Garden was awarded a national AHTA's (American Horticulture Therapy Association) Therapeutic Garden Design Award in 2012.

During the implementation of the Honor Center Gardens, veterans have participated as stakeholders involved in planning, construction, and planting. Described as a collaborative exchange by MG Leah Diehl, RLA, it underscores the therapeutic benefits of the MG driven project; improving lives of veterans by bolstering their self-esteem, developing their skills, upgrading their nutrition through home-grown produce, and providing meaningful activities. The garden has been the platform for enhanced programs where veterans can work, learn, socialize, and rejuvenate in a variety of ways. On a broader scale, the Honor Center Gardens represent a new trend in therapeutic landscapes that recognizes the value of such gardens as healing environments for veterans. The Honor Center Gardens signify the power of plants, people, and the Master Gardener program's community outreach and service.

Problems encountered: The major problems encountered with this project were unavoidable in that the large majority had to do with the lack of funding at the start of the program. With the exception of some outdoor furnishings provided by the VA (garbage cans, seating, shed), the project relied on donations: concrete, plants, lumber, raised beds, soil, mulch, etc.; as well as the labor to install it all. Because VA employees are not allowed to ask directly for donations, MGs have secured most of the donated materials. As a result, the actual construction of the garden started out bit by bit as donations slowly trickled in. Once the word got out about the garden, due in great part to the MGs themselves, donations began to flow in at a more steady pace. Understanding and anticipating this timeline would definitely help reduce frustration in volunteers in similar project situations. The participants in this project realized that it was an ongoing project, elements of which would be added as resources became available. The implementation of phase II of the master plan was undertaken in 2011.

Attachments:

MG Form 20

MG Form 10

Problems encountered page

Attachment 1 Photo Gallery

Attachment 2 Master Plan

Attachment 3 Veteran's comments

Attachment 4 Timeline

Attachement 5 Support for the Honor Center Gardens

Attachment 3 Nomination for Honor Centers Gardens at the Gainesville VA

Comments from Veterans on the Impact of the Honor Gardens

These responses are a compilation from many different individuals

What have you gained from working in the Honor Gardens?

a sense of accomplishment
a lot of knowledge
relaxation
stress relief
enjoyment
happiness for visitors
enjoyment being outdoors in the sunshine.

How peaceful is the garden?

it is very relaxing
very peaceful
wonderful
seven on a ten point scale

What do you like about the Honor Gardens?

being able to eat produce we have grown
seeing different varieties of plants and veggies
being able to plant and take care of the garden (something I'm not usually good at)
I go there for peace and staff can't find me
it is its own special place
it is quiet and peaceful watching things grow
I helped to build it
the garden project is one of the best things here

What other plants would you like to grow?

corn (silver queen)
tobacco plants
strawberries
green beans
orange trees
plums and other fruits
I like it the way it is, like one of my own

These responses indicate several things. Veterans choose to go to the gardens as a peaceful sanctuary. They find meaning in participating in the building of the garden, in planting, and in harvesting its bounty. They look forward to something positive like choosing plants for the garden. The Honor Garden is a peaceful and quiet place they can use and in which they feel comfort at the Domiciliary.

Attachment 4 Timeline

This project has spanned four years. To be as clear as possible for the nomination the following activities with timelines are listed below. Only those activities which occurred Nov. 2011- June 2012 are submitted for this nomination. Note that all services by L. Diehl, RLA were undertaken in the capacity as a Master Gardener.

2009	Gainesville Domiciliary built including one asphalt path, 8 raised beds
	Conceptual idea for Honor Center Gardens discussed with staff and MG Leah Diehl
Jan. 2010	Design of Honor Center Gardens Master Plan created by MG Leah Diehl

Activities Eligible for current Special Audiences Award 2011 which MGS participated in include:

Feb. 2011- June 2011	Implementation of Master Plan including pouring of concrete paths Plant selection, plantings Modifications to design by MG L.Diehl Preparation of planting beds Pruning of existing vegetation Placement of gazebo Replacement of some raised beds using concrete blocks
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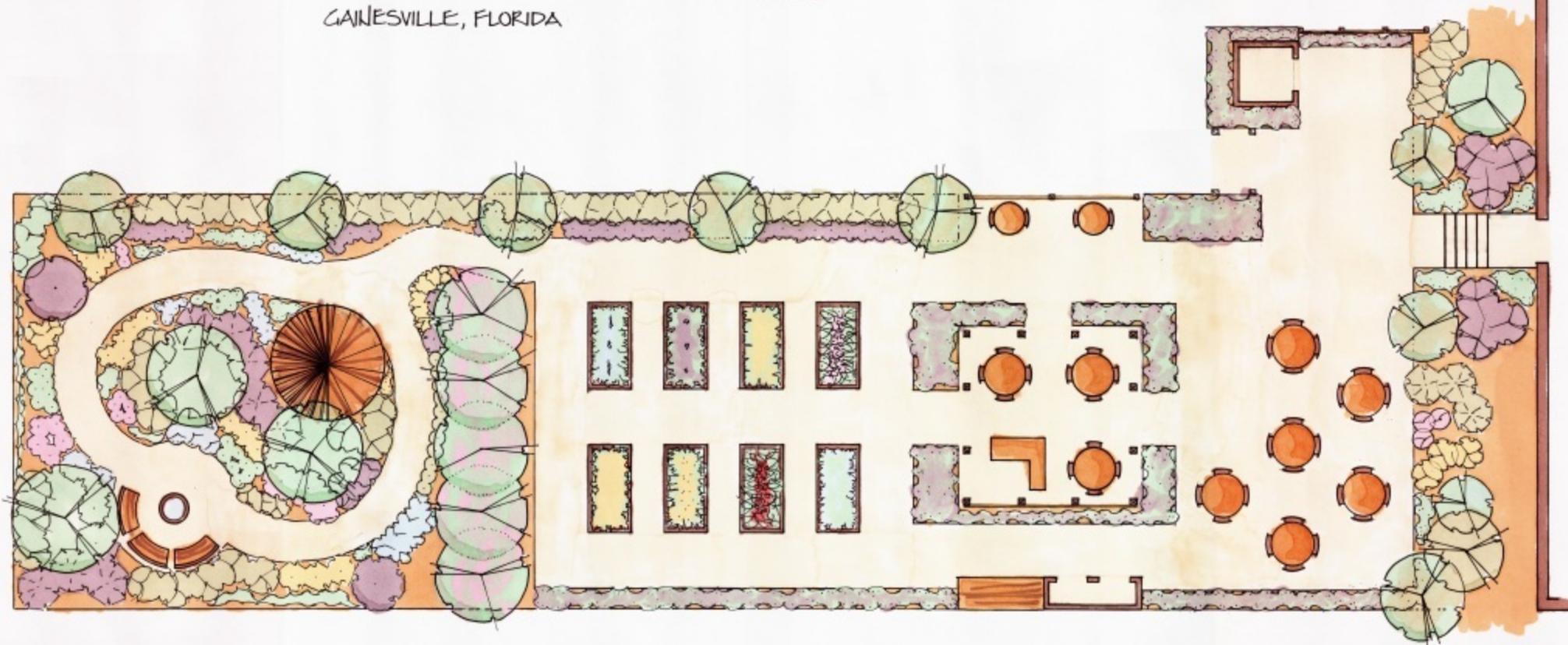
Activities Eligible for current Special Audiences Award 2012 which MGS participated in include:

July 2011-June 2012	Final pour of cement in café garden floor Design and construction of water element- fountain Installation of fountain included both aesthetic and noise distraction features Reconstruction of 10 raised vegetable beds Planting of vegetable beds On-going plant maintenance Completion of fence installation along parking lot perimeter Delivery of weekly horticulture classes by master gardener G. McGann Special events including the official ribbon cutting in March 2012
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Due to the magnitude of the project and the fact that the Honor Center Gardens were built without a capital campaign, the duration of the project has spanned four years. It should be noted that without master gardener involvement in all phases, this garden would not have become a reality. This serves as an important point – that long-term commitment to some master gardener projects is required but requires that extra degree of dedication and service to community.

Attachment 2

THE HONOR CENTER GARDENS
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA



healing garden

kitchen garden

café garden

master plan

$\frac{3}{16}'' = 1'-0''$

Attachment 1 Photo Gallery 2012 Gainesville VA Dom Honor Center Gardens



From humble beginnings and a bit of ground, vets, volunteers, MGs and staff worked together to begin the Honor Center Gardens in 2010.

The start of the journey, the forms for the paths & sidewalks represent the path to healing and restoration.



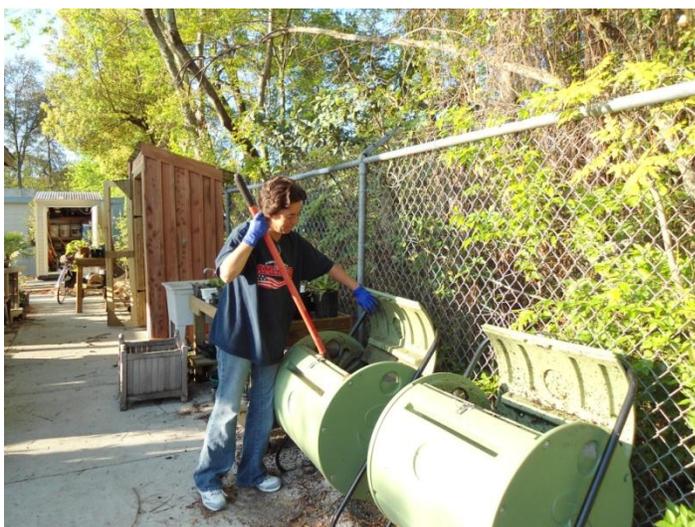
Phase II included upgrading the accessible features of the Honor Center Gardens including the ramp into the gazebo.



Master Gardeners reconstructed 10 raised vegetable beds, seen here being used by volunteer and vet.



Greg McGann, Master Gardener leads a weekly horticulture group, seen here planting seeds, as part of the expanded programs – many beneficial outcomes of the garden.



As the garden developed, more and more activities were possible including composting, seen here being done by a female veteran.



A veteran working in the café garden, with its recently poured cement floor. He is planting a new container garden..with pleasure.

Veterans use the kitchen garden both in formal programmed groups and as individual meaningful activity. To the right of photo is the MG designed and built lattice fence.



The before and after photos of the sanctuary garden and its five crepe myrtles which represent the five branches of the military.





The pleasure and healing that the Honor Center Gardens provide is often visible, and sometimes not. Psychological healing and meaningful activity were the goals for the garden and its users. Mission accomplished.

Produce from the Honor Center Gardens is now sold at farmers market. The benefits of the garden transcend the physical garden space, providing opportunities for skill development and employment for veterans who have been homeless.



Attachment 5

Support for Honor Center Gardens – Gainesville VA Domiciliary- Alachua County Florida Master Gardener Special Audiences Nomination 2011

The Honor Center Garden would definitely not have existed without the master gardeners, Leah Diehl and Alee Karpf. Tight budgets and the reality of working within the VA bureaucracy, which moves slowly is why having the garden is so appreciated by the veterans and the staff. This place of quiet that veterans can go to use their talents by working in the garden is therapeutic; it relieves stress. They see their labor coming to fruition. And then to turn around and prepare meals with the produce is a healthy approach for Dom residents. The staff have had the pleasure of seeing the progression of the garden, which future Dom residents will not see. We have up on our walls pictures of the veterans who have helped build the garden – with big smiles on their faces. On days when they feel depressed, they use these as reminders. We hope that the Honor Center Gardens will become a model of best practices for other Domiciliary and other VA facilities. We have surveyors and guests visit who have never heard of a therapeutic garden or programs in such a setting. It really is very special created by a team of talented people; master gardener Leah Diehl garden designer, master gardener volunteers who got the concrete and our own Alee Karpf.

David Scoates, MSW, LCSW
Chief, Residence at the HONOR Center Domiciliary
North Florida / South Georgia VA Health System
352/548-1800

Fred Fey, Master Gardener Alachua County

Vets are the most important people on the planet and they should be rewarded for their sacrifices. This has been a worthwhile project (the Honor Center Gardens) ...good to work alongside the vets, many of whom are from the construction industry.

When we can turn someone around who has had problems, who can become passionate about plants, or bees – that is the value of horticulture and gardens like the VA Honor Center Gardens. Grandiflora Nursery, our business has a willingness to hire veterans, especially vets who have received some horticultural training or experience from the Honor Center Gardens. We have expressed this to the Alee Karpf, who runs the therapeutic horticulture program at the VA (Gainesville Dom). We are so pleased to have connected with this community project. It puts better light on veterans and the need for more facilities for them.

Ellen Shapiro, VP Grandiflora Nursery, Gainesville
Generous donor of plant material for the Honor Center Gardens





The gardening program is a uniquely powerful example of our commitment to creating a culture of respect and compassion at The HONOR Center. One rainy morning before our facility opened, a group of staff and veterans braved the cold to help set up the gardening beds. From that day to today, the gardening program has been a collaboration between staff, veterans and master gardeners, where people share both the responsibility and fruits of the labor. And, the fruits of our labor have been delicious! When it comes to bringing folks

together, nothing is more effective than freshly picked vegetables cooked to perfection. Our veterans receive the opportunity to learn healthy leisure, give back to their community, and say “thank you” to providers through six small garden beds. Our staff receive the opportunity to teach healthy leisure, give back to veterans, and say “thank you” for a delicious snack. In short, it is an incredible program in an incredible garden, which achieves that rare feat of being a win-win for all!!

Jason Pickren, Psy.D.
Clinical Psychologist
Honor Center Domiciliary

I used to work at the VA building; it wasn't very nice – to see the transformation including the gardensthe concept is coming together before my eyes. For vets who are interested in the garden and take to it, we see them grow as they work. They take ownership, learning valuable skills. I will be presenting at the State Social Work Conference on my experiences at the Honor Center Garden. To see a guy playing the guitar early in the morning in the garden....

Greg McGann, Social Worker, Master Gardener



I am a veteran. Most guys in the service like team work - to accomplish tasks - to make them feel like they are worth something, the overall mentality of doing something important. Working on the garden, you can see it in the vet's faces – a sense of pride. I have worked alongside the vets and Leah Diehl the garden designer who is very humble. I haven't done as much as some guys. I like this master gardener project with the intent to get people working in the garden.

Greg Mullaley, MG Class of 2010

To me the Sanctuary Garden is a place to which I can go when I need a little peace in my life. It has a very soothing and calming effect on me. Another aspect of it is a sense of accomplishment. Myself, a lot of other Veterans, and Volunteers have all come together to make this garden grow. From digging the holes to planting the plants we worked side by side to get our garden to where it is. Our work is still ongoing. A fountain is being built and of course, we have people watering the garden every day. All in all, it makes me feel proud to have helped and it gives back by being a place where I truly can go whenever I need a little time for myself.

Larry Meredith, VA Domiciliary Resident



As Editor of the American Horticultural Therapy Association's national magazine, I have the responsibility of being familiar with therapeutic gardens and their associated programs in the United States. As a master gardener and a Floridian I had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with the Gainesville VA Domiciliary Honor Center Gardens from their inception. Without hesitation, and with pride for Florida master gardeners, I can say that the Honor Center

Gardens are exceptional. Designed with the express intent of focusing on the psychological healing of veterans, the Gardens are successful because they provide a range of experiences to address the point in the healing process that individual veterans may be at, recognizing that no two are on the same journey. For the hundreds of homeless and transitional veterans who have started their recovery and the hundreds more who will have a chance to do the same, this would not have been possible without the Honor Center Gardens, built by master gardeners. The impact on real people's lives is significant, important and inspiring. Although therapeutic landscapes and therapeutic horticulture are not the primary mandate of master gardeners, their contributions to this field, specifically their contribution to veterans in Gainesville is phenomenal and serves to illustrate the power of nature, nurturing behavior and service to fellow man.

Lesley Fleming, Registered Horticultural Therapist

Putting the Honor Center Gardens into a broader context, this article presents the latest thought on therapeutic landscapes in VA settings. Leah's work is part of this emerging trend that can be so important to the healing process for veterans.

HEALTHCARE AND THERAPEUTIC DESIGN NEWSLETTER, SPRING 2010

CITED JUNE 6, 2010 FROM <http://www.asla.org/ppn/Article.aspx?id=25302>

returning home: the veterans therapeutic gardens project

by Steve Mitrione, Associate ASLA

Our nation has been at war for over six years. The wars have produced numerous casualties, as well as injuries that have begun to strain the healthcare resources of our nation as wounded veterans return home. The proposed Veterans Therapeutic Garden Project is a response to this need. We believe **that therapeutic gardens can play a unique role in the recovery of veterans from physical, emotional, and spiritual injuries.** Building on work begun by the Healthcare and Therapeutic Design PPN in 2005, this proposal seeks to build both a framework and a movement for introducing therapeutic garden design into Veterans Administration facilities across the nation. This project will also utilize the development of these gardens as a "laboratory" for research into therapeutic design, furthering our understanding and improving our practice in the creation of therapeutic gardens.

Veterans Healthcare: Scope of the Current Problem

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs is currently charged with providing healthcare for nearly 8 million veterans of the US armed forces, from all conflicts. There has recently been an influx of 700,000 active-duty and reserve military personnel who have been eligible for VA healthcare since 2002 from the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result, the number of veterans receiving VA health service has increased from 3 million in 1995 to 5 million in 2006.¹ Along with an increase in the number of veterans seeking care, there has been a change in the type of injuries that require treatment. Due to remarkable improvements in battlefield healthcare and body armor, there have been a number of veterans surviving wounds that normally would have been fatal in previous conflicts. The result has, however, been an influx of veterans with ongoing disabilities requiring prolonged healthcare services. In addition to the "visible" wounds of war, there are a significant number of veterans requiring mental health services for psychological trauma. Current studies have estimated that 20.3% of active duty and 42.4% of reserve duty soldiers require mental health services for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).² This has placed an enormous additional burden upon the VA system to provide mental health services.

The VA also provides nursing home care to veterans on a short- or long-term basis. The aging of veterans mirrors the demographics of our society in general, resulting in an increase in the demands for long-term care. In addition, many younger veterans with injuries will also require long-term care, further straining the VA's nursing home care system.

The result of all these factors has been a tsunami of need that the VA is admittedly struggling to meet at a time that financing of the VA system is also under strain. According to a Congressional Budget Office study, in order to meet the demands for care, the budget for the VA would need to grow to 53.4 billion by 2025.³ In addition to funding operations, many VA facilities are more than fifty years old and many require updating and renovation.⁴ The recent news about conditions at Walter Reed is an example of this

problem. This infrastructure will also require additional funding.

The Role of Therapeutic Gardens In the VA System: An Intersection of Need and Opportunity

Given the challenges facing the VA system, we believe that **therapeutic gardens have the potential to alleviate suffering, provide for recovery and therapy, enhance the veteran’s experience of care, and reduce costs.** In addition to already documented improvements to outcomes provided by exposure to garden environments in healthcare, it is believed that these environments can serve the unique challenges of the VA clientele in the following ways:

1. Stress Reduction and PTSD Treatment: The role of natural environments in alleviating stress responses is well-documented. There currently exists no research into the role of these environments in alleviating or treating PTSD in combat veterans. Current research and funding has focused on “virtual reality” therapy.⁵ It is proposed that “natural environments” possess similar potential and could significantly aid in the treatment of PTSD of veterans, in combination with standard therapies. Research at the Alnarp rehabilitation garden in Sweden has shown remarkable results for treating a stress-related disorder termed “vital exhaustion” utilizing both natural environments and a horticultural therapy program.⁶ There have been reported cure rates of 80% for this intractable condition. A similar program of natural environments and standard PTSD therapy could be developed .

2. Rehabilitation Through Horticultural Therapy: Horticultural therapy already has a long tradition of assisting patients with disabilities. Given the increased need for ongoing care for veterans, horticultural therapy could provide significant benefits for the VA system. Therapeutic environments can be designed to provide a place for these treatments and services. In addition, therapeutic gardens can be designed for other forms of rehabilitation and physical therapy.

3. Relieving Stress in Healthcare Providers: As a system, the VA is under stress in dealing with increasing demands for services with limited resources. Taking care of the injuries caused by warfare is particularly stressful both in the acute and convalescent phase. The VA, like many other healthcare institutions, has been struggling to retain quality staff and providers. Gardens specifically designed to alleviate stress in healthcare workers can improve quality of healthcare delivery and decrease costs associated with turnover—recruiting and training personnel.

4. Therapeutic Garden Research: Many in the field of therapeutic garden design are adopting principles of evidence-based design, using scientific research results to inform design decisions. The VA system, due to its size and to its single unifying organization, represents a unique opportunity to further our understanding of therapeutic gardens.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Steve Mitrione at smitrione@iphouse.com.

Steve Mitrione, Associate ASLA, is a practicing family physician with Aspen Medical Group in St. Paul Minnesota. He received an MLA from the University of Minnesota in 2006 and was a research fellow at the College of Design at the University of Minnesota from 2007 to 2009. He is currently serving on the board of the American Therapeutic Horticultural Society.

References:

1. *American Medical News*, December 2007 pp. 5-6.
2. Milliken, C.S., Auchterloinie, J., and Hoge, C.W (2007). “Longitudinal Assessment of Mental Health Problems Among Active and Reserve Component Soldiers Returning From the Iraq War.” *JAMA*, vol. 298, no. 18.
3. “The Potential Cost of Meeting Demand for Veteran’s Health Care,” *Congressional Budget Office Report*, March 2005. In 2009, the VA budget was \$47,231 million. See: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbudget/fy09/pdf/appendix/vet.pdf>.
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5. “Novel Approaches to the Diagnosis and Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.” (2006), *NATO Security Through Science Series E: Human and Societal Dynamics* Vol. 6. Ed. Michael Roy. pp. 135-235.
6. Grahn, P., Bengtsson, I.L., Welen-Andersson, L. et al. (2007). “Open Space/People Space: Innovative Approaches to Research Excellence in Landscape and Health.” See: <http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk/conference2007/summary/Grahn.htm>.
7. Ulrich, R. (1999). *Effects of Gardens on Health Outcomes: Theory and Research*. In: *Healing Gardens: Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations*. Eds. Clare Cooper-Marcus and Marni Barnes. John Wiley, NY, pp. 27-86.

As Editor of the American Horticultural Therapy Association's national magazine, I have the pleasure of seeing many therapeutic gardens and their associated programs.