

Woman brings garden to life

BY MICHELLE L. START
Correspondent

Lush Blackeyed Susans, Goldenrod, Gailardia and cotton plants line the land along a lake at Cypress Cove, eliciting a picture of what Florida looked like before it was developed. Although planted just 13 months ago, the native plants have taken root, bloomed and spread their seeds.

The garden was a project resident Lois Dunnam, 79, dreamed up. Her work was recently recognized by the Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation.

“I put in 125 native plants during the first phase,” Dunnam said. “But, we were left with 90 feet of waste area. I thought it would be nice if we took care of that, too.”

“When we came here, I felt so much had been destroyed in Florida that if we could replace a little, it would be a plus for the habitat and for the residents,” Dunnam said.

Cypress Cove is home to about 450 people in the independent living quarters, 44 in the assisted living facility and an additional 64 in the skilled nursing facility, said Assistant Resident Director Sharon Giebels.

Various studies have linked plants and gardens to improved health benefits. A study at the Sloan Kettering Institute in New York

found that women recover quicker from breast cancer surgery if they spend time in a garden. Another study conducted in Pennsylvania from 1972 to 1981 found that patients recovered from gall bladder surgery quicker if they were given rooms that looked out into landscaped gardens.

“At first I couldn’t figure out how I was going to do this,” said Dunnam. “The only way I could think of was by building a brick walk. I found a brick company on the Internet. I went to the director here and he was very supportive. We started with charging people \$50 a brick, but then we figured out that putting in the walk would cost \$3,000, so we raised that to \$100 a brick.”

Residents and their family members can have names engraved on the bricks that line the native plant garden’s walkway.

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She went back to residents and two internal organizations donated a total of \$2,600. In April, Dunnam planted more than 50 new plants.

There are no pesticides or herbicides used and very little fertilized. All of the plants in the garden are native to Florida and require little watering.

Already, the gardens are drawing in wild life. Monarch butterflies visit the milkweed during season. A bird recently built a nest in one of the trees.

“She has just done an absolutely great job researching all of this and finding the money,” said Giebels. “She just took this idea and ran with it.” ■



PHOTO MICHELLE L. START

Cypress Cove resident Lois Dunnam picks a cotton blossom in the native plant garden she created at the adult living facility.

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Letter carriers food drive this Saturday



On Saturday May 12, letter carriers across Lee County will collect food on their mail routes for the largest one-day food drive in the nation. Last year, the food drive yielded over 70 million pounds of food nationwide. Locally, 323,000 pounds of food was collected in Lee County alone. This food stays in our local communities to feed the hungry. Donations of non-perishable food items can be left by mail receptacles – please no glass or perishable food items!

The food collected will feed children who are out of school during the summer months. Without local food banks and agencies that assist low income families, these children would go hungry. The letter carrier food drive comes at a time of year when these agencies are running low on supplies.

In Southwest Florida, the majority of letter carriers are rural letter carriers who use private vehicles to deliver their mail routes. Since these vehicles are smaller than the red, white & blue delivery trucks city letter carriers use, the rural carriers struggle to collect food donated by their customers. Often there is no room in their vehicles for the food. Local residents can assist these rural letter carriers

by collecting food in their neighborhood or volunteering to be available to offload carrier vehicles when they become too full. Anyone who is willing to help is asked to call Debi Mitchell at 573-9638. Volunteers are especially needed in the Cape Coral, South Fort Myers, North Fort Myers, East Fort Myers and Iona neighborhoods. Volunteers who drive their vehicles to collect food or off load carrier vehicles will receive a food drive shirt and a poster to display on their vehicle. This service to the community can be documented for the community service hours that high school students are required to complete for graduation.

Letter carriers are the heart and eyes of the community, driving through every neighborhood and up and down every street. They see first hand the need, and recognize the hardship and despair that denies many families even the basic necessities of life. An estimated 38 million people face hunger every day in America, including more than 9 million children. This drive is one way to help those right in our own city who need help. ■