

EXTENSION

Comings & Goings

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DEAN FOR EXTENSION

Polk County Master Gardeners' Agri-Fest Program Wins International Award

October 2011

Polk County Master Gardeners received the 2011 International Master Gardener Conference “Search for Excellence” (SFE) Award for its Agri-Fest horticulture project that teaches 4th graders about seeds and plants, and about the consumer products that their county produces to support their local agricultural economy. The 1st place award in the

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Left to right: Monica David, Search for Excellence Chair, Dr. David Shibles, Polk County Master Gardener Coordinator, Carol Leffler, Polk County Master Gardener, and Tom Wichman, Florida Master Garden Coordinator.

youth project category was presented by Monica David, SFE Chair, of the University of Illinois during the organization's conference held October 11-14 in Charleston, W.Va. to Polk County Master Gardener Carol Leffler and Polk County Urban Horticulturist Dr. David Shibles. Carol Leffler gave a short presentation about Agri-Fest on behalf of the Polk County Master Gardeners to 1,000 Master Gardeners attending the conference.

Agri-Fest "Horticulture" is a program that attracts 6,000 4th graders and 325 teachers annually in the spring. For 12 years students have been coming from throughout the county to the Polk County Extension Service for this program, which comprises eight agricultural stations. Although the SFE Award was given for the Master Gardeners' project relating to horticulture, students also visit other disciplines including citrus, blueberries, honeybees, livestock, forestry, phosphates, small farms, and the water cycle to learn about the local agricultural economy.

Polk County has experienced a 43% increase in population in the last decade. Most students are less likely to have direct experience with the historically agrarian lifestyle that is a basis of the Polk County economy, despite the continued importance of agriculture in their lives.

Polk County Master Gardeners redesigned the horticulture program in 2010 to focus on giving students hands-on experience. The group developed a teaching tool called "The Market Basket" to introduce students to the direct relationship between horticulture and their everyday lives. Students also potted a plant to take home. The result is that students find themselves learning to appreciate plants and beginning to think about land and water conservation as the basis for success in their environment.

Contact: David Shibles, (gammatwo@ufl.edu), Horticulture Agent, Polk County Extension

Small but Significant Changes after Diabetes Programs

It takes a while, but changes do happen! A class of eight African-American women *completed* five sessions of Managing Diabetes at a local free health clinic. Discussions, mutual support, and sharing of personal self-control and coping mechanisms were encouraged as we covered the various topics. By the end of the series, the pharmacists at the clinic noticed that the participants were picking up their medications *on time!* They were more eager for their test strips! Specific health data are not accessible, but using medications and test strips is a great start. A participant from a previous Diabetes Management series with City Wellness reported that by changing the timing of her meals and snacks she's been able to bring her morning blood glucose down by 30 to 50 points. She depends on a family member to do the cooking, so she's not been able to change foods. But, in the classes she learned other tactics and became empowered to make changes that were in her capacity. She feels better and is at lower risk for complications as a result. Shortening the Diabetes Management series might not be the ideal, but it still provides help, knowledge, empowerment, and support to participants. Clientele as diverse as free-clinic users and city employees with full insurance can benefit. Lowering blood sugar reduces risks of amputations, dialysis, or loss of vision, and it lowers costs of health care.

Contact: Mary Keith (mkeith@ufl.edu), Family and Consumer Science Agent, Hillsborough County Extension

Operation Drag & Snag: Finding Crab Traps Using Side Scan Sonar

In recent years, there has been more awareness about the impact derelict traps have on marine life, the environment, and public safety. In 2008, the Blue Crab Advisory Board, made up of

industry stakeholders, discussed ways to remove derelict traps and proposed regional closures to help identify derelict traps. The Board selected six regions and closure dates to minimize the economic impact of the closures to the industry. The closures were implemented because Florida law is specific about what is considered a derelict trap during the open season, making it difficult to identify traps that had become lost or abandoned. In May 2011, the Charlotte County Sea Grant agent received a side scan sonar unit on loan from Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) to see if it could be used to identify submerged abandoned traps within the dark waters of the Peace River. VIMS researchers have successfully used side scan to identify submerged traps in Chesapeake Bay for the last 4 years. Through field testing, the agent was able to identify more than 100 submerged traps prior to the 2011 rotational closure in southwest Florida. Using the side scan with targets identified and a homemade dragline, the agent and a crew of volunteers recovered 61 submerged traps during the closure. Twenty submerged traps were still fishing when recovered. Seventy five blue crabs and a handful of other fish and invertebrate species were released. This project demonstrated the utility of using side scan to mitigate the impacts of derelict fishing gear in coastal waters.

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Co-Parenting after Divorce: The Business of Raising Children

More than 1 million children experience their parent's divorce every year. Parental conflict related to divorce is a societal concern because children can suffer detrimental economic and emotional effects during this difficult family transition. Many parents are so caught up in their grief and anger that they cannot focus on the stress a divorce places on their children. The Florida Parent Education and Family Stabilization

Act requires divorcing parents (or never-married parents involved in a custody procedure) to attend a 4-hour parenting class. In 2011, 106 parents attended the Parenting for Divorce class in Hillsborough County. The skill-based relationship class focuses on identifying the grief process in children and adults, a child's emotional needs and concerns, legal procedures such as resolving time-sharing issues, family dynamics, domestic abuse and neglect, effective communication with the co-parent and child, and available community resources. Evaluations showed that more than 95% of attending parents felt more able to communicate constructively with their co-parent, could work more cooperatively about child-related decisions, could better manage their anger when communicating with their co-parent, and have an improved understanding of how divorce affects children. Although the classes can be emotionally intense, nearly 100% of the parents felt they had improved their skills for helping their children adjust to divorce and felt more positive about being able to raise competent, healthy children as a "business partner" with their ex-spouse. After-all they are in the business of raising children! Monthly classes will continue in 2012.

Contact: Diana Converse (converse@ufl.edu), Family and Consumer Science Agent, Hillsborough County Extension

Reading Garden Blooms at Newton Library

A local Sarasota County Library reading garden comes alive with color and crops. Sarasota County 4-H youth and Extension volunteers partnered with North Sarasota Library, local New College students, and the Parks and Recreation Department to beautify a garden plot that had deteriorated in past years. The garden now produces vegetables and blooms with colorful flowers. This project highlights the positive impact of joint efforts in enhancing community resources that better-serve citizens. 4-H youth members,

have assumed the responsibility of caring for the garden through routine maintenance efforts. The North Sarasota Library, located in the minority community of Newton, serves as a major resource for educational programs and leadership development in the area. The library was the second one in the U.S. to earn LEED Gold certification. A diverse audience now enjoys the garden resource, including senior citizen groups, families, and the hundreds of citizens who visit the library facility each week.

Contact: Keith Wilson (kwilson@ufl.edu), 4-H Agent, Sarasota County

Polk County Master Gardeners Shine at State Awards Conference

The Polk County Master Gardeners made history as they took two trips to the podium as state winners for outstanding projects. The State Master Gardener Conference was held in Orlando October 24-26. Polk County was recognized in the categories of “Community Beautification” and “Demonstration Garden.” A third trip to the podium recognized their success at the International Master Gardener Conference held 2 weeks earlier as 1st Place Winner for their youth horticulture program, “Agri-Fest.”



- The Community Beautification State Award was given for the “Little Gem Magnolia Project” in Fort Meade. Fort Meade resident and Master Gardener Debra Howell worked with the Chamber of Commerce and city staff along with other

Master Gardeners to make this project a reality. A citywide project, “Fort Meade PRIDE,” resulted in plantings of Little Gem™ magnolias

and vinca in large brick street-planters, beach sunflowers at public intersections, a butterfly garden at Peace River Park, and a program for community groups to adopt areas for beautification gardens.

- The Demonstration Garden State Award was given for the “Florida Friendly Demonstration Garden” at the Polk Training Center for Handicapped Citizens in Lake Alfred. Master Gardener Molly Griner designed the project, using the nine principles of Florida Friendly Landscaping™ as a basis for demonstrating



sustainable changes for landscapes while also conserving water. Thirteen volunteers contributed 300 hours of service to this project, which has ongoing goals for education of the general public as well as Polk Training Center students.

Contact: David Shibles, (gammawo@ufl.edu), Horticulture Agent, Polk County Extension

Taking Charge of the Irrigation System

In December 2010, the Sarasota County Florida-Friendly Landscaping Program initiated the *Homeowner Irrigation Evaluation* program. Since the start of the program, 87 irrigation evaluations were conducted. Staff, funded by the

Southwest Florida Water Management District, instructed homeowners in basic irrigation system management techniques. Homeowners learned how to take charge of their irrigation system by setting the irrigation clock, adjusting the irrigation system seasonally, calibrating the irrigation zones, and capping irrigation heads in areas with mature xeric plants. Opportunities for installing micro-irrigation components were also discussed. Of the 21 homeowners evaluated, 91% had made changes such as cutting down and/or adjusting watering time, capping sprinkler heads and redirecting others, and stopping overlapping irrigation zones. A similar Manatee County program reports that, on average, participating homeowners saved 26,600 gallons per year, bringing the **potential** annual water savings to $87 \times 26,600 = 2,314,200$ gallons. An Olympic size swimming pool holds approximately 668,000 gallons of water, so the water saved would fill 3.5 Olympic size swimming pools ($2,314,200/668,000$).

Contact: Keith Wilson (kwilson@ufl.edu), 4-H Agent, Sarasota County

New Faculty

Please welcome the following new faculty:

Keri Leymaster (kleymaster@ufl.edu), Residential Horticulture EA I, Orange County, 10/7/2011

Please also welcome James Moll (jimmoll@ufl.edu) into his new position as Residential Horticulture EA I in Hernando County (10/1/2011) and Gary England (gke@ufl.edu) into his new position as Fruit Crops, M/C EA III in Lake County (10/10/2011).

Retirement

After many years of service and dedication, Ray Zerba (Clay County Horticulture Production Extension Agent IV) has retired. We want to thank him for all of his contributions to UF/IFAS Extension during his long and illustrious career.

