

ZONTA TEAM CREATES NATIVE GARDEN AT SWFAS

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The benefits of connecting with nature are well documented in scientific research, yet many people may reach adulthood without encountering the beauty of plants or creating a garden. Thanks to the Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva, the new halfway house for women at Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS) is enhanced by a beautiful area of native plants and shrubs. Created as a joint venture of the Zonta Club, the Transitional Living Center at SWFAS and the Native Plant Nursery in Fort Myers, the garden is the first of its kind on the Fort Myers campus of the award-winning addiction recovery program.

The project began in May and ended in June in time for the dedication of the building which took place on June 17th. Zontians Ruth Woodham and Phyllis Gresham (a master gardener in her home state of New York) came up with the plan. They met initially with the women, all of whom are enrolled in the residential treatment program or living in supportive housing. Since the project was intended to be educational as well as adding visual appeal, the group was first introduced to the merits of native vegetation and was asked for input on choice of plants.

The women then collected newspapers and spread them on the prepared soil to provide a barrier to weeds. Mulch from the City of Sanibel was delivered and spread by David Jedel of Tree West, paid for by Ruth and Greg Woodham. Phyllis Gresham serves on the City of Sanibel Vegetation Committee and is a member of the Native Plant Society; she and Greg Woodham are both avid gardeners. Purchase of the plants was made possible through donations by the Woodhams and Greshams and John Sibley of the Native Plant Nursery.

Finally, it was time for planting. Ruth Woodham picks up the story: "The plants were delivered on June 10th. Phyllis and I spent the evening helping and educating the women how to place them in the ground. Everyone pitched in, even some of the men who dug the holes. It was probably one of the most rewarding experiences we have shared with the TLC."

The garden is on the south side of the building, overlooked by two screened porches. The design is anchored by an arbor with native coral honeysuckle and a live oak tree. Shrubs include Simpson stopper, Bahama cassia, ilex, and golden creeper. Color is added with dune sunflower and gaillardia. Pentas, not strictly natives, are included for butterfly attraction.

The women are now responsible for maintenance and watering until the plants are established. This project is the latest in a long series of support sessions provided by Zonta club members, in addition to financial grants and other resources over the past eight years.

The Zonta Club of Sanibel/Captiva is a service organization of professional women working together to provide hands-on assistance, advocacy and funds to strengthen women's lives on the islands, in Lee County and around the world through Zonta International. For information, visit www.zontasancap.com.

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Photo # SS8500-337: The garden is overlooked by screened porches on the south side of the new halfway house



Photo # SS8500-333: The TLC group, with Phyllis Gresham at left, celebrates the completion of the planting.



Photo # SS8500-325: Supervised by Zontian Phyllis Gresham, planting continues.



Photo # SS8500-319: Women of the TLC plant the live oak tree