FBGF Holiday Lights

By MARY SWEENY,
FBGF Board Member

The Holiday Light display at the Florida Botanical Gardens is a wonderful gift to the community. As treasurer of the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation, Inc., I am glad we were able to partner with Pinellas County and the Master Gardeners to “Keep the Lights On.”

My husband John and I spent Saturday evening December 13 at the Gardens welcoming the visitors. We set up a table with some information and signs asking for donations for the light display. Barbara Kirkconnell and her sister joined us. We had fun talking with the visitors. Two families were taking pictures to use for their Christmas cards. What a great idea! Thank you to the Master Gardeners for helping solicit donations and keeping the gardens looking beautiful. We did have one accident, Rudolph the Reindeer fell over and broke his red nose.

Here are some facts about the lights this year. There are 425,000 lights and it took 600 man-hours to install. The lights belong to the Foundation. Celebration Lighting Services (CLL) is responsible for putting up and taking down the lights. I spoke with Beth Weaver of Celebration and she spent 3 weeks just testing all the strings of lights in the storage building. We purchased some new L.E.D lights to replace non working lights and we hope to continue replacing the old lights with the new L.E.Ds in future years. The L.E.D. lights use only 23% of the electric needed to power the old style. Pinellas County (you and I – the taxpayers) upgraded some of the electrical panels which have helped fix some of the problems of prior years where circuits were overloaded. The County is also paying the electrical bill to power the lights. Our thanks to County Staff for their help.

Listed below are some of the questions or suggestions we received: Where is the train?, Where can I buy the bumble bee, bird or flower lights?, Why are you not charging an entrance fee?, Where is the hot chocolate/coffee?, Is Heritage Village open, are there decorations?, You should have a Santa Claus!, You should play music!

Here are some ideas for next year: Sell Starlight necklaces, Sell 3-D paper glasses. When you look at the lights you see a snowflake or a Santa Claus Face, Explore the feasibility of selling bumble bee, bird and flower lights.

By CHUCK SCAFFIDI, MG

It was a personal, rewarding experience to participate in the Holiday Light Celebration funded by the FBG Foundation. I wish to thank the MGs that spent time in the evening to collect visitor donations and it was a pleasure to work with the foundation members who also worked many evenings.

Yes, we collected many dollars from generous visitors who were more than willing to make a contribution and always remarked with many "oohs" and "ahs" for the outstanding light displays they enjoyed. The most popular ones for the children were the butterflies, bumble bees and the alligator. For the families the wedding garden and tropical walk was breath taking.

I admit I was apprehensive about collecting donations, but after my first volunteer night I quickly learned that almost everyone was reaching for their
We are especially appreciative of staff, MGs, and others who contribute articles, events, and other items of interest to The Green Leaf each month. Please submit your input by the 20th of each month. This will help us assemble and publish the newsletter in a timely manner. Also, to save mailing costs, please limit your articles to 700-800 words or less. Limited newsletter space does not allow for full photograph viewing. If you would like a copy of any photograph presented in the newsletters, please contact me @ 727-582-2117.

Chuck Scaffidi
MG Editor

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wallet without being asked. So the job really turned into "thank you-enjoy the lights and come back to see us next year." As Mary Sweeny highlighted, we learned and listened and have many suggestions to consider for next year.

As of December 28 over 7 thousand dollars was collected to help defray the $35,000 light display cost paid by the Foundation. I roughly estimate about 1500 people visited each night. Bob Albanese has installed laser counters so we may be able to come up with a more accurate number.

The lights remain open until January 4 so you still have time to come out and see this wonderful display and help us greet the public if you so desire.

Remember to tell your family, friends, and neighbors about the garden lights. The Foundation may keep the lights on through Super Bowl Sunday, and don't forget we have a contract to do this again next year.

The photos seen below are just a sampling of the displays. Without proper lighting at night they are not as breath taking as actually seeing them.
Plant of the Month
By JAMES STEVENSON, Public Education Specialist, FBG

Bamboo – The Super-Grass

Bamboo is a familiar plant. Even the youth that visit the gardens for one of the 4-H programs immediately recognize this plant, and most associate it with another familiar organism: the giant panda.

But bamboo is an important plant well beyond its support of the big bear. Among grasses (in the family Poaceae,) the bamboos are contained in a Tribe, the Bambuseae. Within this tribe, there are approximately 91 Genera and 1,000 species. Bamboos are distributed throughout the warmer areas, with several species adapted to colder climates as well. Although bamboo in the landscape is evocative of the Far East, there are species of bamboo native to South America and Western North America as well. Most bamboo will grow for years and years, eventually flowering all at once and then the whole plant dies. This happened in European botanical gardens in the last century, when a clump of the South American Chusquea was divided and shared amongst gardens, the resulting clones all flowered at the same time and all died!

With so many species, there is an inevitable diversity in form. From the diminutive Pleioblastus sp. which can be found on the north side of the Extension Welcome Center (around the giant bromeliad, Alcantara imperialis,) to the massive “timber bamboo” Bambusa oldhamii on the east side of the building, bamboo comes in many forms.

Bamboo is among the fastest-growing plants known. For this reason, it has been exploited for centuries as a rapidly-reproducing source of wood and fiber. Of course the culture of bamboo is well-established in the Far East, there are still a few bamboo farms in the Deep South of the US. In Alabama, bamboo is still grown to produce the “cane-poles” used for fishing.

Bamboo is now being looked at as a major supplier of fiber for paper-making, flooring, and even fibers for clothing. It is reported that the soft fabric made from bamboo fiber is naturally anti-bacterial. A perusal through the University of Florida's website could not confirm this, though.

So it seems that bamboo has a lot going for it as a landscape and renewable fiber plant. There are caveats, however. The labor needed to harvest and process bamboo into wood products is, right now, prohibitive to its production on a large scale. Also, the process used to extract the soft fibers necessary to create cloth uses nasty chemicals that may not be best for the environment.

Anyone with a neighbor growing bamboo might be full-aware of its propensity to TRAVEL. The underground “runners” find very little resistance in coursing through our sandy soils, and as a result have found themselves on the "invasive exotic" list. To control its spread, intensive mowing is recommended (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AG266.)

A botanical garden can allow visitors to see the potential growth of different landscape plants. The extensive use of bamboo at FBG might be an opportunity to "teach from our mistakes" in the future as the massive clumps of bamboo will eventually require extensive (and expensive!) control as it pushes its way through the concrete!
**IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- MG Advisory Association
- MG Update Meetings
- 2009 Costa Rica MG Trip
- Volunteer Hours Sign in
- Update on the Children’s Trail
- 2009 MG Conference in Las Vegas

**RECORDING YOUR VOLUNTEER HOURS**

Please Remember to Sign Out!
The computer program for logging volunteer hours is in the volunteer office.
- You must **sign in and sign out** when you are at Extension.
- You can still log your time in the book or use e-mail, but it is preferred that you use the computer sign-in sign-out method.
- With over 200 volunteers at Extension it becomes a considerable burden on the volunteer coordinators to manually enter your hours.

If you have been sending your hours by e-mail, use the form in the log book as a guide and send to: MGEDU@co.pinellas.fl.us.
Please direct your questions to coordinator Chuck Scaffidi or an assistant, Susan Baughman or Mary Crowe.

- **MG Advisory Association, Chuck Scaffidi, Chair**
  MGAA will be officially closed on December 31, 2008.
  Since I was involved in MGAA’s inception almost 5 years ago, I have mixed feelings about its demise. In some ways it was an educational and rewarding experience for me and I most enjoyed the interaction with the MGs, Board members and Officers concerning MGAA matters. In another way I do feel somewhat relieved from the responsibility our MG organization had.

  We accomplished a lot through the monetary returns of extraordinary hard work provided by many MGs offering plant sales at least twice a year. I have more than a page of projects listed showing the money used to support our beautiful gardens at Extension, and money that we generously gave to other non-profit organizations.

  I encourage everyone to strongly support the FBG Foundation since their mission is to support the gardens with the cooperation and assistance of the Master Gardeners and also to consider becoming a member. The newly constructed Children’s Trail and Holiday Lights celebration are an example of MG participation in FBGF projects.

  What I am especially proud of is that every Board meeting we held had a quorum to conduct business. So, thanks to the many that were active in MGAA that made it a productive, and beneficial non-profit organization.

- **Master Gardener Update Schedule - Mark your Calendar!**
  **January 8 at 10AM** - All About Worm Castings- Jane Maxwell
  **February 9** - Orchid Care and Propagation - Michael Polen from Art Stone Orchids. He will have orchids for sale too!
  **March 9** - Landscape Design Basics Gail- Marie H. DeChapman Extension Specialist in UF Center for Landscape conservation and Ecology
  **April 8** - Questions from the Desk – a hands on review of Plant ID, diseases and pests -Andy Wilson, Horticulturalist
  **May 8** - Insects -Cindy Peacock, Horticulturalist

- **Master Gardener Costa Rica Trip 2009**
  Costa Rica has some of the most diverse wildlife and natural landscapes in the world, ranging from tidal mangrove swamps to sandy beaches, to tropical rainforests to subalpine mountains. Florida Master Gardeners traveled to Costa Rica in 2004; they had such a wonderful experience, they decided to go back.

  **Date: April 22 through May 3 (12 days/11 nights)**
  Itinerary: [http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/tours/costa09_2.shtml](http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/tours/costa09_2.shtml)

- **Summer Home in Michigan**
  MG Ray Bradshaw has a mobile home which was owned by his father who passed away in November. It would make a great summer home in Michigan. Call Ray at 727-394-1151 if you want more details.

- **Cats and Other Curiosities**
  Jude Bagatti has a 19-image *film* photography show currently on view in the Lobby Gallery of Gulfport’s Catherine Hickman Theatre. The lobby is open daily 9-5 and evenings during events. Her photos depict cats from around the world as well as a few curious images, and will be up through January.
**Highlights from the Children's Trail Committee Meeting**

Children's Trail Chair, Pat Dieterich, is planning visits for the committee members to other gardens in the region that offer children's activities. Current plan is to look at other areas in the FBG that we can expand for the Children's Trail. So visiting other gardens will inspire us and help us decide what new stations should be added to our Children's Trail. Some of these visits will take place in lieu of the next few monthly meetings.

**Committee Members:** Dianne Wheatley-Giolotti, Mary Campbell, Vivian Haicken, Alyssia Chivers, Betty Lipe, Cindy Peacock, Chuck Scaffidi, Pat Dieterich, Bob Albanese, Andy Bergeron and Bobbie Jones.

**International Master Gardener Conference**

"New Frontiers" in Horticulture and Gardening -March 22-26, 2009

Spring in the desert is an incredible time. Native plants, flowering in yellow, orange and red, really put on a show. Tours to the Master Gardener Orchard and to the exciting, new Springs Preserve where you can see sustainable, low water concepts at work. The University of Nevada Master Gardener Orchard is an outdoor living laboratory testing different types and varieties of fruit and vegetables. It demonstrates how to grow the best fruit possible, with minimal agricultural chemicals, under our harsh desert climate. The orchard today has over 500 trees, wine and table grapes, and vegetable test plots on a little over an acre.

**Registration Deadlines:**
- Early Bird Registration, $260 — ends November 15, 2008
- Regular Registration, $310 — ends February 15, 2009
- Late Registration, $350 — if available

You can register on line. Please visit the website for more information: [www.unce.unr.edu/imgc](http://www.unce.unr.edu/imgc).

**The Silver Whistle**

Jude Bagatti will appear in the Gulfport Players' production of The Silver Whistle, a rollicking comedy which takes place in an old folks home. She will play the role of Mrs. Gross, a wheelchair-bound, moral fanatic. The show runs Jan. 8 thru 25, 2009. The Hickman Theatre is on Beach Blvd., Gulfport, 727-322-0316. Jude can be reached at [heyjudebagatti@msn.com](mailto:heyjudebagatti@msn.com) or 727-322-6211.

**Volunteer Opportunities & Events**

**For January & February**

- **Tampa Bay Home Expo**
- **Compost & Vegetable Beds**

**Help Needed at the Tampa Bay Home Expo Extension Exhibit**

Tropicana Field St. Petersburg on January 23 through 25, 2009.

- Friday, Jan 23, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. - 2 people
  2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. - 2 people
- Sat., Jan 24, 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. - 2 people
  2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. - 2 people
- Sun., Jan 25, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. - 2 people
  2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. - 2 people (last shift will also assist staff with exhibit tear-down)

Please email Carol Suggs [csuggs@pinellascounty.org](mailto:csuggs@pinellascounty.org) with times you can help or sign up on the board when you are in the office.

**Help Needed in Composting and Raised Vegetable Bed Areas!**

Volunteers are needed to work in the composting and raised vegetable bed demo areas on Tuesday and Friday mornings.

Contact John Kingsbury 727-569-6409, Pam 727-582-2112 or Carol 727-582-2124 to let them know if you are interested in this volunteer activity. You might get to take home some wonderful compost!
By PAM BROWN, 
Urban Horticulture Extension Agent

Happy New Year! And now another year begins. I hope that each of you had a wonderful holiday season. It does seem to be a whirlwind sometimes.

New Master Gardener training graduates – don’t forget to pick up your CD of the training PowerPoint presentations. They are in Pam’s office on the table. Be sure to sign the list when you take your CD. There are also copies of this CD for those veteran MGs who have trained to work at the front Lawn & Garden Diagnostic help desk. I think that you will benefit from having these presentations with the pictures in color. If you find that you cannot view the PowerPoint presentations, you can download a free Microsoft PowerPoint viewer from: http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/downloads/CD010798701033.aspx.

If you have any questions about volunteering as a Master Gardener, activities that accrue volunteer hours, or about procedures in the Florida Botanical Gardens or Extension, please feel free to come to me for answers or information. Once I retire, Jean Field will be working with you helping to provide continuity until a new agent can be hired. For those of you who may not know Jean, I will introduce her at the January 8th Master Gardener Update. You can also still take questions to Carol Suggs in my absence. The Master Gardener program should continue on with MG Updates and volunteer opportunities while the search goes forward for my replacement.

I want to congratulate and thank you for the number of volunteer hours that you provided to our mission in 2008 – 37,176 hours! Using the Independent Sector value for volunteer service hours in Florida of $17.38, these hours equal a monetary value of $646,119. Wow! You guys are wonderful. I don’t think we can ever thank you enough. With our continued budget challenges, your volunteer service becomes more important than ever.

We are so thankful for each of you and that you have decided to volunteer with us as Master Gardeners.

♥ Pam

Christmas Tree Recycling

If you have a “real” Christmas tree this year, please recycle it.

There are convenient curbside and drop-off recycling options available. The collected trees will be processed into mulch, which is made available at 20 free mulch sites around the county.

To find out specific details about whether your city has a tree recycling program visit this link: http://www.pinellascounty.org/utilities/getridofit/xmas_tree_recycling.pdf

Mark Your Calendars for March 13, 2009
Celebrate the 4-H Centennial in Pinellas County
By JANET GOLDEN, Distance Education & 4-H Program Leader

2009 will be here before you know it and with that comes the Florida 4-H Centennial Celebration! Did you know that nationally 4-H celebrated 100 years in 2002, but in Florida we reach 100 next year? Pinellas County 4-H would like to celebrate that milestone here locally. The Pinellas County 4-H Foundation is planning a fundraising dinner with a centennial theme on March 13 at 6:30PM at Banquet Masters in Pinellas Park. Tickets will be $50.00 for adults and $25.00 for youth. This will include a buffet meal, guest speaker, and plenty of entertainment. The proceeds will go to the Pinellas County 4-H Foundation to support the operating expenses of the 4-H programs and to pay for youth scholarships. More details along with invitations will be coming, but we wanted to make sure you saved the date now.
Pinellas County Extension Master Gardeners
Open Plant Clinic

Do you have questions about a brown spot spreading across the lawn? Do you need help identifying a troublesome bug in the garden? Pinellas County Extension Master Gardeners will share their expertise at a new Plant Clinic designed to answer those questions and many more. The new clinic will offer diagnostic services on Wednesdays from 10 AM to 2PM starting January 14 after the re-opening of the renovated Palm Harbor Library.

Services include soil testing along with information about identifying plants, treatment for insects, starting a vegetable garden and ideas for Florida-friendly landscaping. Please note that water tests still need to be delivered to the Extension's Largo office, and no live animals should be brought into the clinic for identification. The north county location will be convenient for residents unable to travel to Pinellas County Extension in Largo.

Master Gardeners will celebrate the new service by participating in the library's grand re-opening party Saturday, January 10, 2009. The library has undergone a year-long renovation project that upgraded the existing 26,000 square-foot facility and surrounding area. The library is located at 2330 Nebraska Ave. in Palm Harbor.

For details on some of the events listed go to the calendar on the Pinellas County Extension Lawn & Garden website.
Reminder

- MG Update Thursday, January 8 at 10AM
  "All About Worm Castings" presented by Jane Maxwell.