



# Poling Gardens in Bloom



# Samoset community

- ▶ Unincorporated portion of Manatee County
- ▶ 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East - US 301 passes through center of community
- ▶ Population 4146 in 2020 census
- ▶ Racial makeup
  - 63% white
  - 27% African American
  - 18% Latino or Hispanic
- ▶ Median income \$29,962 for household
- ▶ 22% below poverty line
- ▶ “Mosaic of cultures and traditions”

# Habitat for Humanity's selection of homeowners

All applicants must:

- ▶ Have an Income between 50 and 80% of area median income
- ▶ Have a stable employment record
- ▶ Have at least 2 years of steady income and decent credit rating
- ▶ Contribute \$2000 towards their closing costs
- ▶ Have the ability to repay a 30-year mortgage with 0% interest rate
- ▶ Contribute a minimum of 300 hours of “sweat equity” into building their own home

# Homeowner had to put in 300 “sweat hours”

Ketty hiding under hard hat



Jose had a little help from his family



# History of collaborative project

- ▶ Manatee County Habitat for Humanity applied for Elizabeth Eaton Charitable Trust Funds from Manatee River Garden Club
- ▶ Funds granted for years 2023-2024 and again in 2024-2025 (\$2000 each year or \$200 for each of 16 new homes)
- ▶ Planning group from MRGC met with Emily Lane, H for H Development Director to plan project (Judy Boehm, Barbara Murray, Marial McRae)



# Poling Gardens progress

Tomato farm in past



Broke ground  
December 10, 2022



Finished in summer, 2025



# MRGC teams and process

- ▶ Each homeowner was assigned to one of team leaders (Holly Switow replaced Mariel McRae)
- ▶ One or two MRGC members were asked to help the team leader with each homeowner

# Laquisha worked with Barb as team leader and Jacque Ruch

EarthBoxes with herbs and tomatoes



# MRGC teams and process

- ▶ Each homeowner was assigned to one of team leaders (Holly Switow replaced Mariel McRae)
- ▶ Several MRGC members were asked to help the team leader with each homeowner
- ▶ The team attended the home dedication as able

# Dedication ceremony



CEO Bernie Quinn speaking at Kieriney's dedication



Homeowner Jose giving remarks

# Dedication ceremony



Lillyann with Bible, flag, keys  
(and first aid kit)



Milangela receiving house keys

# Dedication ceremony

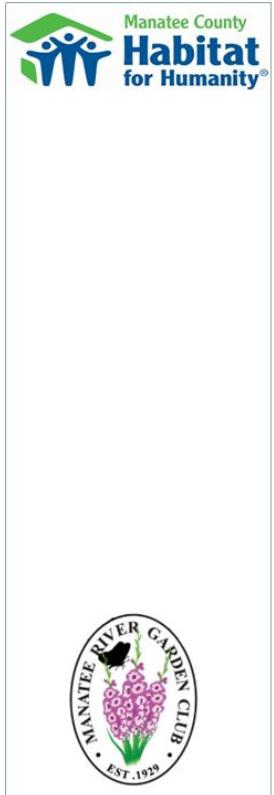
Ketty and son Diego  
cutting ribbon into  
house



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- ▶ The team attended the home dedication as able
- ▶ The team met with homeowner to discuss the type of plantings available using the brochure we developed

# Brochure given to new homeowners describing the project



## OPTION #1: PLANTERS

You will receive 2 planters filled with soil and plants that can be placed on either side of your front door.

Care: These will need to be watered regularly. The flowers may need to be replaced seasonally or annually based on your choices.

Care: Newly planted trees and shrubs require frequent watering until they are established. They will then require weekly or as needed watering.

## OPTION #3: EARTH BOXES

You will receive 3 different sized Earth Boxes planted with edible herbs or vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, thyme, or basil. Plant selections will depend on season and availability.



## OPTION #2: LANDSCAPE PLANTS

You will receive a tree or additional landscape plants to enhance your front yard and garden beds. This could be a fruit tree, an ornamental tree, or additional plants in the garden beds at the front of your home.

Care: These will require watering as the reservoir on the bottom empties. Vegetables will need to be harvested as they are ready.

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- ▶ The team attended the home dedication as able
- ▶ The team met with homeowner to discuss the type of plantings available using the brochure we developed
- ▶ The team helped the homeowner in the selection of the plant/pot/tree/EarthBox
- ▶ The team worked with the homeowner (and family) to plant
- ▶ The team discussed with the homeowner how to take care of the plant
- ▶ Each homeowner was given a welcome basket

# Showing off their welcome baskets

Ketty



Kleriney



Viviana





# Planting with the homeowners

# Ketty worked with Judy and Paula Wolfe

EarthBox with herbs



# Jose worked with Judy and Jane Ellis

Christmas palm tree



# Bernatta worked with Judy, Sandy Brophy and Linda Fountain



EarthBox with strawberries,  
lettuce, swiss chard

# Keiriney worked with Judy and Linda Fountain

2 planters with cordyline, penta, and creeping jenny



# Nelsie worked with Judy and Sandy Brophy

2 hanging pots with vinca  
and creeping jenny



# Jennifer and daughter worked with Judy and Olivia Cox (and Doug)



Hanging pot with succulents;  
decorative pot with  
cordyline, lantana, coleus



# Teresa worked with Barb, Betsy Lieberman, and Nancy Albert

Decorative pot with cat palm



# Ben worked with Barb and Mary Patterson

EarthBox with tomatoes,  
peppers, herbs



# Viviana worked with Barb, Denise LeBlanc and Lucinda-Jane Chastain



EarthBox with herbs,  
tomatoes, coreopsis,  
scaevola



Brunfelsia grandiflora,  
duranta erecta, coriander,  
purple salvia, purslane

# Noelia worked with Barb and Denise LeBlanc

EarthBoxes with pentas,  
lantana, vinca



# Holly's homeowners presented a variety of circumstances

- ▶ Milangela wanted pots for inside her home
- ▶ Latrice had EarthBoxes delivered
- ▶ Naketa - never able to connect
- ▶ Farah was a knowledgeable gardener who added many plants on her own. Holly gave her a gift certificate to purchase plants for the EarthBoxes she delivered.



# Farah's house well landscaped



# “Poling Gardens in Bloom” dinner at club on October 7



# Challenges of the project

- ▶ MRGC teams needed to be flexible in planning to get together with new homeowner (all homeowners had children; 80% were single)
- ▶ There were difficult growing conditions since middle of summer, little shade, and no irrigation in properties
- ▶ We had no advance knowledge of Habitat plant selections
- ▶ Plant selections needed to be simple in choice and simple to maintain
- ▶ How can the MRGC team member be involved in planting when also need to document with photos?
- ▶ It was a challenge to interact with the homeowners in a helpful, supportive way yet not be invasive to their space.
- ▶ Documentation of plant option and specific plants (with scientific names) should have been included all along
- ▶ It would have been good to have media publicity for MRGC's efforts

# Benefits of the project

- ▶ Increases visibility of MRGC to the community
- ▶ Provides a unique opportunity for interaction with others in our community
- ▶ Helps finish the “look” of the new homes
- ▶ Gives us an opportunity to learn about these intelligent, hardworking young people in Manatee County
- ▶ Gives members an opportunity to share gardening skills with homeowners
- ▶ Enhances members’ sense of purpose by contributing our gardening knowledge and time to our community
- ▶ MRGC members enjoyed getting to know each other better because of working together on this project



MRGC made  
new garden  
friends  
thanks to  
your efforts!

