



# 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 met with homeowner to discuss the type of plantings available using the brochure we developed

# Brochure given to new homeowners describing the project



*Congratulations  
on your new  
home!*

*A Gift*

*from the Manatee  
River Garden Club  
and the Eaton  
Fund*



## Gift Selection

Founded in 1929, the Manatee River Garden Club has provided education, arts, community service, and beautification throughout Manatee County for over 90 years. We are happy to give each new Poling Gardens homeowner a gift to enhance the beauty and landscape of your new home.

Please choose the gift that you would like, and a member of the Manatee River Garden Club will work with you in selecting your plants and getting them in place.

## 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.



## 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: 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 EarthBoxes planted with edible herbs or vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, thyme, or basil. Plant selections will depend on season and availability.



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!**

