

BEAUTYBERRY POST

THE NEWSLETTER OF



MACKAY GARDENS AND LAKESIDE PRESERVE

January-February / 2015

The Destruction/Creation Team By Steve Franklin

During a recent Tuesday volunteer work day at Mackay Gardens, while doing some gardening near the house with volunteers Sondra, Margrit, Tom, and Cathy, it suddenly occurred to me that there was a method to our madness. It has been described by more than one person as the Destruction/Creation Theory. Pablo Picasso once said, "Every act of creation is first an act of destruction." What did he mean? Col. John R. Boyd, a fighter pilot who created combat strategies which led to many successful flight missions, decided to try and determine how he came up with ideas that until then had not been tried. This study resulted in the labeling of a circle of events that must be in constant motion in order for new ideas, forms, or

concepts to become manifest. The four parts of the circle are: Observe-Orient-Decide-Act. Volunteer coordinator Cathy Butcher, through observation and the use of formal and informal brainstorming sessions, has tapped into that concept, and that, in part, is the reason why the grounds surrounding the Mackay house have become more attractive each year since the City of Lake Alfred acquired the property.

A typical work day will find volunteers working in areas that have become overgrown with small cherry laurel and camphor trees, cat's claw vines, weeds, unwanted grasses, and any number of other undesirable or invasive plants. Though green, and by some observer's standards lush, these areas comprise formal garden plots which are no longer recognizable. By the end of the morning, that Tuesday, several large piles of debris were visible around the perimeter of two nicely shaped plots where, lo and behold, a number of beautiful plantings still existed. The destruction and removal of undesirable plants had led to the re-creation of a very decorative plot of land which has the potential to become even more beautiful through the addition of perhaps a few native or ornamental plants in appropriate locations. As Michelangelo Buonarroti once said when describing the process which led to the creation of one of his magnificent sculptures, "I saw the angel in the marble and carved till I set him free." In this case volunteers saw the beauty hidden in the overgrowth and set it free.

Michael Bridge is quoted as having said, "When our eyes see our hands doing the work of our hearts, the circle of Creation is completed inside us, the doors of our souls fly open and love steps forth to heal everything in sight." As the eyes of the volunteers at Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve see their hands doing work which is healing that property, by the end of each work day the circle of Creation is completed in each of us, and we feel satisfied and renewed. Won't you join us some Tuesday in this "the work of our hearts?"

Top photo: View looking west across the back lawn at Mackay Gardens with stunning blooms of *Pyrostegia venusta* decorating the top of a pine snag. See accompanying article on the Flame vine!

All photos in this edition are by Cathy Butcher

Calendar of Events

January 2015

- 1/10 Bluegrass Bash 11a-9p
- 1/11 Nature Hike 2p
- 1/13 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Tue.)
- 1/20 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Tue.)
- 1/27 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Tue.)
- 1/31 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Sat.)

February

- 2/3 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Tue.)
- 2/5 First Thursday Gardening Series 10a Florida-Friendly Ground Covers
- 2/8 Nature Hike 2p
- 2/10 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Tue.)
- 2/17 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Tue.)
- 2/24 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Tue.)
- 2/28 Mackay volunteer work day 9a-noon (Sat.)

March

- 3/5 First Thursday Gardening Series 10a Perennials for Florida

April

- 4/2 First Thursday Gardening Series 10a More Edible Landscaping

May

- 5/7 First Thursday Gardening Series 10a The Magical Springs of Old Florida

Save the dates: May 16, August 15, November 14 - Astronomy Nights 7-10p

Volunteers are a necessary component for progress and success at MGLP. Whether it is working to improve the gardens, restore native habitat, or assist with advertising or fund-raising events please consider a donation of your time for this worthwhile endeavor to protect a piece of Florida history and habitat. We need volunteers! Contact Volunteer Coordinator, Cathy Butcher, to find out more. cassiebelle@verizon.net

Master Gardener Corner

By Cathy Butcher

What do pyre, pyromania, and *Pyrostegia* have in common? Fire! Keep that in mind as you drive through Polk County this month wondering about those brilliant orange-red blossoms you see covering trees, fences, and sometimes the ground. *Pyrostegia venusta*, or **Flame vine**, is blooming in its full glory from now into spring. *Pyrostegia venusta* translates into “fire roof beautiful”. Its rapid vertical growth rate and clinging tendrils allow it to climb to the top of mature trees, or any structure, and vigorously spread across creating a canopy of dangling flame-colored flowers. The beautiful blooms and vigorous growth make it ideal for planting on fences, trellises, or arbors; however, pruning will be needed to control it from slithering across into your neighbor’s yard or worse, into natural areas.



The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) is keeping a wary eye on this South American native. In some areas it has escaped cultivation and invaded native habitats. The vine will cover any tree or shrub in its path thus preventing photosynthesis from occurring, eventually killing the tree. The dense canopy growing over vegetation can shade and alter native habitat conditions. It has proven difficult to eradicate in these situations. In Florida, flame vine does not produce viable seeds but spreads across the ground, rooting at each node allowing it to establish a thick root system. Freezes and fire will kill top growth but sprouts quickly return from the rooted nodes. Disking the soil breaks the plant into many segments



of plant material that are likely to root.

At Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve a beautiful specimen of flame vine can be appreciated at the west side of the lower back lawn. It is perched in the top of a pine snag and from the size of the trunks wrapped around the pine, the plant has existed for quite a while. It has also invaded areas in the Preserve. Those plants will eventually be removed. Growth of this lovely vine will be allowed and controlled only within the Gardens.

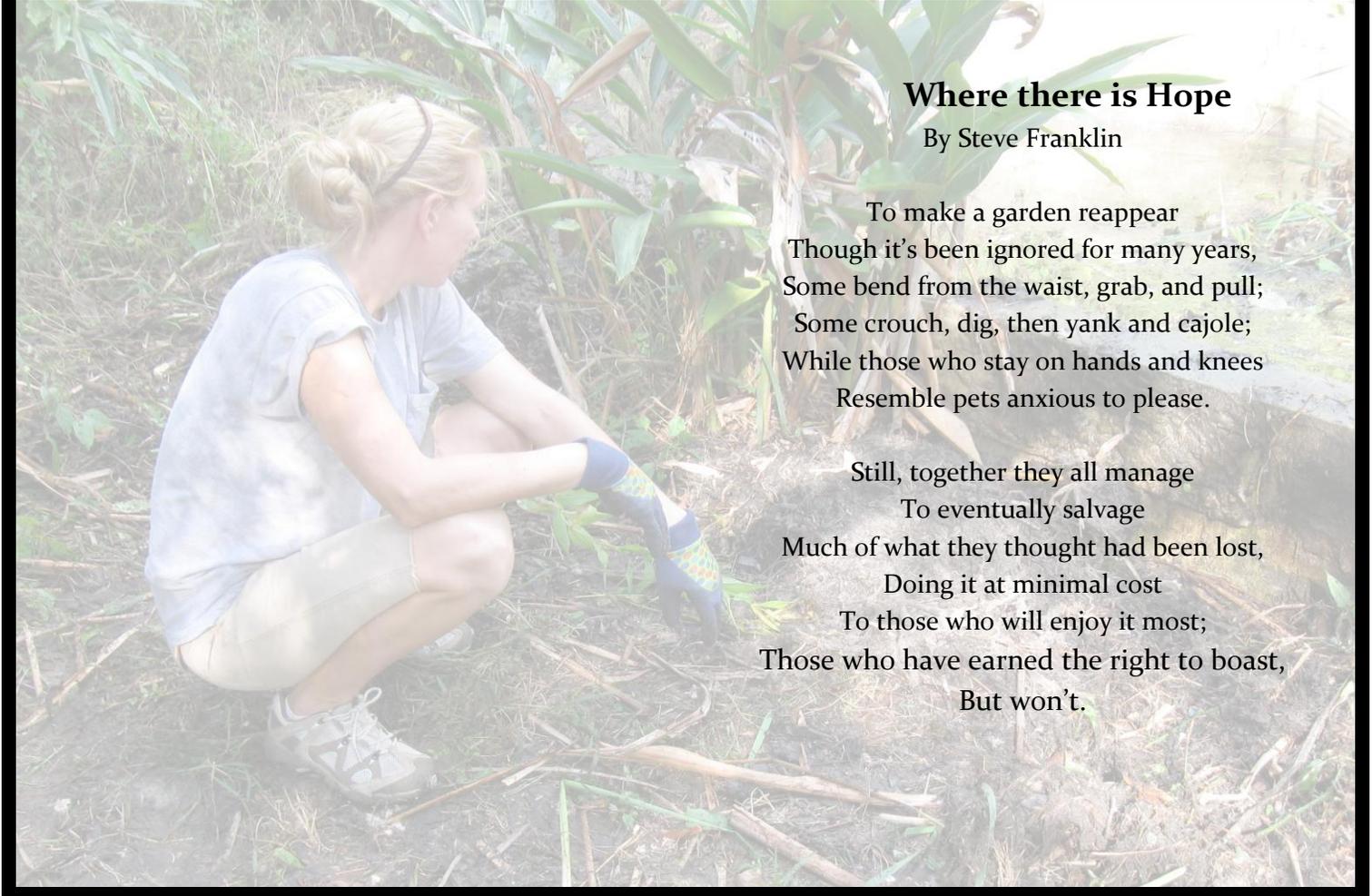


To learn more about growing this plant visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> and search for document FPS496, written by Edward F. Gillman, professor in the Environmental Horticulture Department, University of Florida.

To find out how to control or remove *Pyrostegia venusta* from your property consult this article from *Wildland Weeds* written by Jeffrey T. Hutchinson for the Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida.

<http://www.se-eppc.org/wildlandweeds/pdf/Fall2005-Hutchinson-pp7-11.pdf>

The following picture is of Polk County Master Gardener, Dee Epperson, pausing during her efforts to help restore the Grotto at MGLP.



Where there is Hope

By Steve Franklin

To make a garden reappear
Though it's been ignored for many years,
Some bend from the waist, grab, and pull;
Some crouch, dig, then yank and cajole;
While those who stay on hands and knees
Resemble pets anxious to please.

Still, together they all manage
To eventually salvage
Much of what they thought had been lost,
Doing it at minimal cost
To those who will enjoy it most;
Those who have earned the right to boast,
But won't.

History By Nancy Daley

Editor's note: Though the following account is the last in our series of articles about the history of Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve, we thought it a great way to begin the New Year since it was written by Lake Alfred's Mayor Nancy Daley a short time after this wonderful historic home and gorgeous plot of land became an important part of the City of Lake Alfred. It is an inspirational story about how average citizens, when they band together, can accomplish incredible feats. Here's Nancy's story:

I became involved in government six years ago when my friend Betty asked me to go to a Lake Alfred city commission meeting to lend her moral support while she cleared up a zoning issue. While we were there, I saw a picture of a proposed housing development that looked horrible. The developer was proposing 1270 housing units (single family homes, condominiums, and townhouses) on less than 300 acres. The property was half orange grove and half pristine, natural land between two lakes with endangered animals and plants as well as historical and archeological elements.

I was so upset by what I saw that I made some flyers and mailed them to the people who lived nearby. As I dropped them into the mailbox I hesitated as if I knew somehow that this would become a life-altering mission. The response was remarkable, and soon we were having neighborhood meetings and hiring an attorney. We were not anti-growth; however we wanted to make sure that this development would be compatible with the rest of the town.

Since the project required a zoning change, there were many public hearings with citizens on both sides speaking passionately about their feelings. Some wanted it to move forward as planned so Lake Alfred would get some long awaited progress in the housing market. Others were hoping to reduce the density to manageable levels while a few people hoped that the property would not be developed at all.

The project was sure to pass as three out of five commissioners had voiced support for the zoning change. The final meeting was scheduled for September 11, 2001. Due to the events in New York that day, the meeting was canceled. By law, it would take three weeks to schedule a new public hearing. During that period of time one of the commissioners had to resign creating a two/two split on the vote for the project. Election Day was only two months away.

My new activist friends convinced me to run for the office (I thought, "If it is so much fun why didn't they want to do it?"). After a tumultuous election I won a seat on the commission. As a matter of fact, there were three vacancies filled in that election, all won by people who campaigned for responsible growth. At the first meeting after we took our seats the developer withdrew his request to change the zoning.

With the blessing of the commission, I contacted the Trust for Public Land and asked for their help to write a grant and negotiate with the developer of the property to sell the most sensitive areas to the city for preservation. We carved out 112 acres (with a mile of lakefront), and solicited the Florida Communities Trust to help purchase the land. Our application ranked number seven out of the initial seventy-eight applications state-wide and in June of 2005 we were awarded \$2,500,000.00 to create the Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve.

Since that time I have written a grant for \$150,000.00 to build a playground, nature trails, fishing pier, canoe launch, parking lot and soon to be constructed restrooms. I also wrote a successful grant to the Florida Division of Historical Resources for \$335,000.00 to renovate the historical home located on the property for use as a community center and wedding place. This work is ongoing. The access roads are currently being constructed and hopefully the preserve will open soon.

Incidentally, there are single family homes and townhouses currently being constructed on 150 acres (the former orange grove) of the original property. Lake Alfred finally got some new housing which is now located adjacent to a beautiful nature preserve. This is a fine example of "Growth Management by Conservation." It would not have been possible without

the cooperation and spirit of “working together” by the city residents, officials, and staff as well as the developer.

Editor’s Note: All of the grants received did lead to the completion of the projects listed above. Concerned citizens and supportive agencies helped Nancy’s vision become reality.

Recent Happenings

Congratulations to Parks Department Administrative Assistant, Anaeli Quinones, for receiving the Employee of the Year award from the City of Lake Alfred. Her quiet and orderly behind-the-scenes efforts support the success of many of the functions which take place at Mackay, including emailing of this newsletter. Thank you Anaeli!

Work to restore native habitat within the Preserve continues with the establishment of a fire break prepared courtesy of the Forestry Service. This portion of the property awaits the proper weather conditions for allowing a controlled burn. Spraying for invasive plants in the Preserve is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2015. This important action is being funded by a grant awarded through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Weekly volunteer work days have been changed from Wednesdays to Tuesdays. Also, one Saturday per month will be added in hopes of encouraging participation from those who otherwise cannot be at MGLP on a weekday. Please join us! It’s fun! Work days begin at 9am and go at least until noon. You do not have to attend the entire time and may show up late if you desire. Some gardening tools are provided but feel free to bring your own.



Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve is located at 900 Mackay Blvd. Lake Alfred, 33850. It is free and open dawn until dusk every day. To inquire about renting the facilities for weddings or other events, contact Parks and Recreation at (863)291-5272 or email Anaeli Quinones at aquinones@mylakealfred.com.