



WINTER NEWS 2021



President's Letter

It feels like a lifetime ago that I wrote my last letter to you all, but it just feels like that because of the very strange pandemic times we are living in....although there is certainly light at the end of this particular tunnel now with the vaccine rolling out well across the country!

We are so fortunate to have so many wonderful volunteers who give their whole hearts and energy into keeping our gardens and fort so beautiful, and propagating many wonderful plants which we either plant in our own gardens or sell to our visitors.

We have accomplished much in these past few months, including power-washing all of our brick pathways and gun mount areas – everywhere looks sparkly clean AND most importantly, safe to walk on. A big thank you to Lou Ann & Butch Steely, Mary Olson and our expert power-washers – Bull and Rusty (See photos).

We have installed two new ecofriendly benches, entirely made from recycled plastic, overlooking the labyrinth; our intention is to gradually replace the wooden ones as they get older.

If you wander around the Courtyard and Butterfly gardens you will see six beautiful African Sculptures gracefully placed amongst the foliage, which the Garden Club was fortunate enough to have donated to us. We are planning an exhibition giving the history of these precious pieces of art in our newly restored circular Powder room....more on this project later!

I honestly believe that our orchids are the best ever! Lynne Bentley-Kemp's photos of our orchids are the most shared and loved of all our posted photos and one particularly gorgeous photo has won a TripAdvisor award!!

Our large Green Gazebo now has a new roof, newly painted walls, shelves and floor AND is termite free, ready for all the events and weddings to use it in the months ahead.

Dave Deck, our "unsung Hero" for 2020 has been incredibly busy rebuilding the support beams in the pavilion to keep the walls upright and standing, so that by the time we are all permitted to meet again in person, the room will be safe and sturdy.

Tunie Hamlin has been leading the wildflower planting on top of the hill, which is now a blaze of color.

Everywhere, our volunteers have been making a difference and turning every corner of the gardens and fort into a photo opportunity! I cannot thank you all enough.

I look forward to being able to see many of you in the upcoming months, as restrictions lessen and we will be able to meet again in person.

DO come and visit the gardens whenever you can – it is such a gorgeous place, with restorative powers; you cannot help but come away with new hope in your heart!

All best wishes,

Rosi

President, KWGC

Here are a few snapshots of the last few pandemic months. The Garden Club made it through, and we are now open our regular hours.

A huge thank you to the wonderful volunteers who showed up and socially distanced, and to our receptionists, especially Michael Perkinson who donated his time during the summer months.



First, the sad news. The Gardens were damaged by storms in November and the plants were so unhappy. But, of course, Rosi, Shelly and Synda were on the job, along with other intrepid volunteers! *Christine Pattee and Maria Valladeres moving a "Keys tumbleweed".*



And things got better.

We are resilient!!

Propagation

The schedule of volunteers came in on different days, kept the birdcage going, and made sure the plants did well. Carol Borland working the cage and Sharon Thomas replenishing the plants for sale in the courtyard. Thanks to Patti Rodriguez for keeping those crotons coming!



Kitty Sommerville and Lynne Bentley Kemp refurbished the center wall in the shade house with a new weed barrier. Two layers, no less! Thanks to Mike Sheehan, who rebuilt a collapsed 3-tier bench for Propagation and who



took on the project of replacing our broken shade area frame in propagation. The new one is built out of a strong PVC and carefully attached to the wall. Jerry Lieberman assisted and Don Tiedeman arranged for Summerland Ace Hardware to provide a discount on the materials.

And then came Christmas

Jane Tiedeman and her elves did a fabulous job of decorating the Fort for Christmas. There were lots of twinkly lights that could be seen at night for drive-by's or walk-by's. We were festive in the time of Corona!



Fertilizer Party



Hazel Hans is making sure every plant will be fed.

From Rosi--I can't thank you all enough for fertilizing the gardens...what a team!

Special thanks to Lou Ann and Mary Olson for providing such tasty snacks as a

thank you (and the mimosas weren't bad either!!)

Thank you Murphy & Rahn for transforming the rare palm garden on the side of the hill, opposite the white gazebo – you can see each individual tree now – they are magnificent. Next week we will feed and mulch them!

Thank you Steely for being “my main man” and hauling the fertilizer bags around for us all!

Thank you to Donna, Cathie, Sharon L and Christa for coming in on a Monday to help get all our fertilizing done – really appreciated.

The Key West Garden Club is SO fortunate to have such dedicated, hardworking (And FUN) volunteers, which is why the gardens look so beautiful and there is really positive Karma there!



Orchids

Sharon Jones, Pam Van Soest and the orchid team kept our orchids in tip-top condition.



An Amazing Donation



These are photos of two of six Shona statues which were carved by free Black artisans in the 20th century and given to this Garden in the 21st century by American born descendants of formerly enslaved African people to memorialize the suffering, longing and courage of kidnapped Africans buried in the African Cemetery on a tropical beach in Key West during the 19th century. "May we never forget."

A plaque will be installed inside the fort in what has now become our 'history room'. It also happens to be the closest part of the fort to the African Cemetery.

And more kind donations...

Many thanks to Dianne O'Connell who was so generous in contributing to the establishment of our Labyrinth. Craig Berube-Grey, a local stone mason, created a substantial base for the Labyrinth plaque and bases for the Shona Statues. It was quite a feat to get everything set up!





Unsung Hero

Every year the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys recognizes the efforts of non-profit's volunteers. This year the Garden Club celebrated Dave Deck. Dave has been volunteering at West Martello for five years now, has done a lot of work on the wrought iron gates and fences, refinishing and rebuilding benches, and just general fix-it stuff.

Our unsung hero has also spent an enormous amount of time sorting out and redoing our workspace after the bunker ceilings were completed, including building a first-class workbench. Dave always goes over and above what is asked.

Thank you to Dave and all of our generous volunteers.



Power Washing

Thanks to the team of Butch, Rusty, Bull, Lou Ann and Mary. All our pathways and gun mounts are stunningly clean again and safe!!

Murphy Davis and Eloise Pratt cleared plants in the courtyard.



School Tour

On January 27, Rosi Ware, Mary Olson and Cathie Gottschalk took two groups of students from Grace Lutheran School on an educational tour of the gardens.

The first group were first graders, and were full of curiosity and energy! They asked smart questions and when they reached the labyrinth on top of the hill, knew instinctively what to do!!

The second tour was made up of 9-11 year-olds. These students were incredibly knowledgeable about plants, the environment, entomology and ecology, and took copious notes of everything we spoke about on the tour—from the very rare semaphore cactus, the cycads and dioons in the “dinosaur garden” to the Silk Floss “Monkey don’t climb” tree; one student noticed bees pollinating the aloe plants and caterpillars munching the milkweed in the butterfly garden.

If these kids exemplify the younger generation, I believe the world is in good hands!! A wonderful time was had by all!





One Human Family

The Garden Club offered our space for the distribution of the gorgeous photography book **Isolated Island** which Roberta DePiero and Carol Tedesco spear headed as a fund-raiser for Sister Season Fund. The fund is locals helping “locals employed in tourism-related industries when a temporary financial emergency occurs through no fault of their own.” They raised \$60,000 to help workers in Key West.

Our own Rosi Ware wrote the Foreword, and club members Susan Bailey and Lynne Bentley Kemp were photographers.

The book reflects the spirit of Key West during the pandemic.



The group of the photographers and others involved in the making of the book.





A nice photo of Eloise and Chuck Pratt and niece Emma and her husband, who were married in the Gardens in December.

The Pratts have been active in the Garden Club for years.

Always ready to pitch in and help with any project such as the Library or the Plant Sale and much more.

They are all sporting a range of T- shirts from our merchandise at the Club. New designs and hats too. Check out our merchandise!



Butterfly Garden

Thank you to Bridget Dawson, Ellen Engleson, Cathie Gottschalk, Christine Pattee and others, with Donna Farrow in the lead, for keeping the butterflies happy.

Our good wishes to Donna Farrow who had a health issue but is doing well.





Stay safe and we will see you when this is over. Many virtual hugs and positive thoughts to all.

Thank you for photo contributions from Kitty Somerville, Rosi Ware, Hazel Hans, Eloise Pratt, Sue Sullivan and Lynne Bentley-Kemp.

Thank you to Christa Varacalli for proofreading.

Sue Sullivan, Editor

