



Fall Newsletter 2025

Message from the President



Happy Fall!

Your Garden Club has been busy, even in the hot summer months!

We have volunteers returning; and it is wonderful to see them, catch up and have the workers back. Lynne Bentley-Kemp and Brian have done a superb job maintaining and improving the Gardens. Lynne's artistic eye is a great boon to the beauty that we see.

The Annual Fall Plant Sale and Art Market is coming up on November 21 and 22. It is a wonderful community event. The plants your Propagation team grew are gorgeous and healthy, and will be big sellers. I hope you can all come and see how pretty the Gardens look, buy plants and visit the art vendors.

Now we roll into the holidays. The year 2025 is the 70th Anniversary of the Garden Club taking over the Fort West Martello. Yes, it was 1955, when the agreement began with Monroe County! What started as a messy bare slate is now one of the most beautiful areas in Key West. Mark your calendars for December 3rd and join us in a gala event to celebrate. You can see the results of the elves' decorations and lights!

Enjoy your holidays with family and friends. And before you know it, we will be ringing in the New Year and greeting 2026 with renewed joy.

Mary



Work Around the Garden

Alan Meece leveling bench area



Penny Willis thinning out plants



Loretta DiTocco moving plants



The county truck emptying the brush bin. Melanija and Steve filling it right up again!

Melanija Borlja is one of our excellent receptionists. When she is not at the desk, she volunteers in the gardens. Here she is removing the large almond leaves from the flax lily garden beds.

Melanija has also helped us with advertising and is a great seller of the courtyard plants.





*Brad Refsland, Kitty Somerville (Propagation lead),
Pam Van Soest (Orchid lead)*



Pam and Lou Ann Steely with repotted ground orchid

Butterfly Garden



← October 2024



October
2025

Cathie Gottshalk, Barbara McShea, Christa Varacalli (taking a break from Propagation)

What an amazing difference!

A huge thank you to ALL the volunteers who put in sweat equity this past summer and fall.



New Merchandise

Kitty Somerville, Carol Borland and friends have been busy elves. They have come up with wonderful new ideas to help the Club financially. Here are examples of what they have created.

The Fairy Wands have been a huge hit. They sell almost as fast as they can make them. The wreaths have also sold well. These will be available at the Plant sale and Art Market. Don't miss out, they make great gifts!





Caro Appreciation Time

Caro, Jean Le Fort, came to work at the Garden Club around 1998. Pat Rogers was President and had met Caro when she was landscaping in the Caribbean Islands. Caro worked for her there and when she came to Key West, he followed. He has been a big help throughout the years especially after hurricane devastations. He showed up with Haitian friends and attacked our fallen trees and dead plants when there was little help to be had. Caro and his machete have some legendary stories!



Recently the Club had an appreciation event for him. Debbie Jo Clem gave him a “golden” rake. Lynne Bentley-Kemp gifted him with a special photograph and Kitty Somerville presented him with cards of appreciation.

New Employee

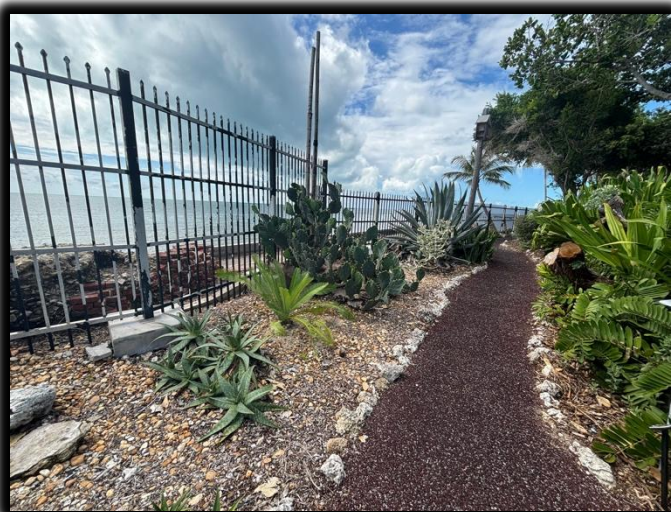
Our new cleaning/maintenance person, **Richard Maldonado**, is working out very well. He gets his assigned tasks done efficiently and moves on to other things. Just this past week he replaced the large slat in the bench at the white gazebo. He is quite capable and refreshingly enthusiastic.

Richard is pictured here with Karyn Bradshaw. Karyn is another wonderful receptionist who has gone above and beyond to make the Gardens a special place.

We are fortunate to have receptionists that are excellent with communicating any issues that may arise.

These past months have been busy with electrical and plumbing issues. Hazel Hans, Fort Curator, finally got the County to send a plumber to fix the slip/sliding toilets in the ladies’ room so they are now secure. The electrical receptacle boxes in the reception area were rewired from the breaker box by Check Electric.





On the Hill

Lynn Bentley-Kemp is keeping the hill areas overlooking the ocean looking great. The cactus area is a neat contrast to the flowering areas.

November Plant Sale and Art Market

Our November Plant Sale and Art Market is just around the corner on Nov 21st and 22nd. It is such a joyful event, and a perfect place to pick up plants for your own garden.

The art vendors have interesting items that make great Christmas gifts. Hope you all come and support the Gardens and say Hi! To your neighbors.



Patti Rodriguez nurtured 80 beautiful crotons and Kitty Somerville cultivated many tomato plants that survive in our climate. There are also neat Thanksgiving items.

So come on down!

Thanks to Nell Smets for advertising our sale on her golf cart around town.



More Fun Events Coming Up

An Enchanted Evening in the Key West Gardens at Fort West Martello 70th Anniversary

Celebrating Past, Present & Future

***Join Us for the 70th Anniversary Celebration of the Key West Gardens at Fort West Martello
on Wednesday, December 3, 2025 from 5:30 pm to 8 pm***

Please join with us for a very special evening amid a magical display of lights and tropical beauty as we honor 70-years of our beloved Key West Gardens. Hear from some of our “keepers of the fort” as we celebrate the past, present and future in a visual display of lights, and garden history and as we share our exciting vision to continue to build on Key West Gardens’ legacy.

Tickets are \$70 per person and will help kickoff our capital campaign with a goal to raise \$100,000 in 2026 while you enjoy:

- Island-inspired cuisine and cocktails by Kaya Island Eats along with a selection of wine/beer
- Live string music under the lighted palms
- A silent auction with local treasures to win while supporting the Gardens
- Catching up with friends and community members in fabulous Key West casual seasonal attire

Whether you're an avid admirer of the Gardens’ peace and beauty, a member, or just looking for a magical night out in the holiday season, this event promises joy, connection, things you probably didn’t know about Key West history, and an opportunity to preserve a vital part of our island’s tropical history.

Tickets are available at <https://keystix.com/>

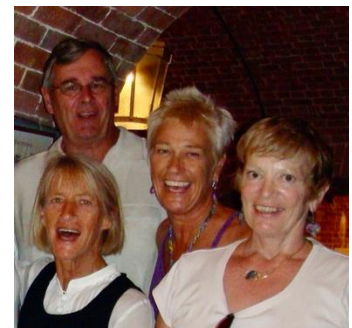


Winter Luncheon

Mark your calendars for Saturday, January 17th from 12 pm to 3 pm. To be held once again at the Ocean Room of La Trattoria Oceanside. This was a huge success last year so don’t miss out. Tickets will be available in December on our web site.

In Memorium

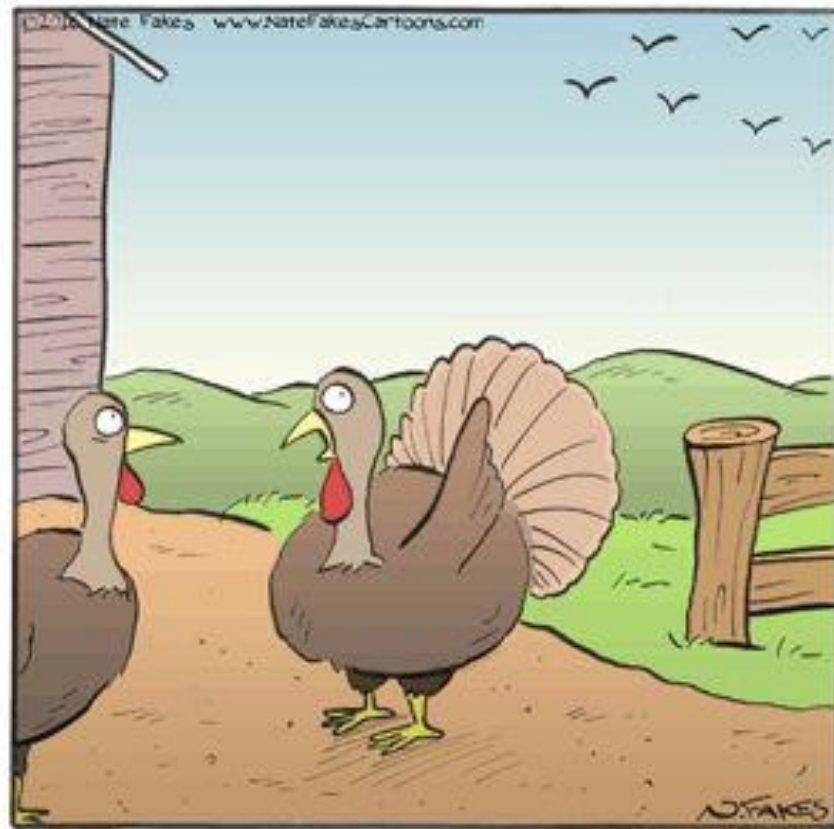
Ron Zemlicka passed away in October, 2025. He lived in Safety Harbor, FL. Ron had been a very active member of the Garden Club while living in Key West, acting as receptionist and treasurer at different times. He is pictured here with his wife, Holly, Rosi Ware and Sue Sullivan. He was a very gentle and generous man.



Donations

A donation to the Gardens was made by Josi Amaral in honor of **Evagelia “Litza” Samaha**.

Wishing you all a Happy, Healthy, Peaceful Thanksgiving!



"Before the end of November, we
need to learn to do that."

*Thank you for photo contributions from
Lynne Bentley-Kemp, Nell Smets, Kitty Somerville, Hazel Hans, Loretta DiTocco and Sue Sullivan.*

Thank you to Christa Varacalli for proofreading.

Editor, Sue Sullivan