



Key West
GARDEN CLUB
WEST MARTELL O
Winter News 2025

Happy Winter/Spring! Seasons do not always strongly identify themselves here in Key West, although 2026 has brought us one of the longest cold spells a few weeks ago. Yes, we even found a few stunned iguanas in the garden, a sight rare in Key West.



Despite the “Siberian cold front,” every year our busy season brings us so many wonderful return volunteers. On many Monday mornings we have thirty-five to forty busy people! And in the past months we have also welcomed some new volunteers that keep the garden in top shape.

With additional volunteers, many projects that take extra help can be tackled: the new arch arbor heading up the hill by the butterfly garden, removal of some larger overgrown plants, and numerous items that we are unable to accomplish during the summer months. And coming soon is a new Propagation table and tiki roof. Thank you to everyone who is so willing to help. And special thanks to all of our donors who make these improvements possible.

We are all very disappointed to realize that our annual garden tours did not come together for 2026. We are looking for a person who is able to step into those shoes to organize it. We have some ideas for gardens, and always need your ideas and help. And there are a number of people to help that new Chairperson. The garden tours are our largest fund raiser of the year, and we will work towards a 2027 tour.

I am excited to inform you that we have a member who is a parliamentarian professional and has formed a committee of volunteers to review and update various portions of our By-Laws. The member is Carol Prahinski, and you may recognize her name as being the Chair of our November plant sale. In March, there will be a few updates provided to all members via email. And then at the April 1st meeting, we will have an opportunity to understand further and vote on the changes.

Hearing from people who attend our general membership meetings we are realizing that the Wednesday meeting schedule does not work for them, as it sometimes overlaps with the Woman’s Club meetings etc. With your feedback we will make the adjustments needed.

I hope to see you wandering around the gardens soon and appreciating the wonderful work of all our volunteers.

Mary

Winter Luncheon

The January luncheon was held at the La Trattoria Oceanside. Food and friends were wonderful. Thanks to Kitty Somerville, Carol Borland and Sharon Thomas for putting together the fairy wand centerpieces.

Crowned were Carol Borland, Queen of the Fairy Wands and Carol Prahinski, Queen of the Plant Sale.



November Plant Sale



It was another great year for our Plant Sale and Art Market. Thanks to Kitty Somerville and her crew and Carol Prahinski for overseeing the event. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped make this sale successful. This involves getting plants delivered from Homestead, in addition to our own, labeling and placing them in the courtyard, putting together and taking apart all the tables and having a good time doing it!

10:30 Lesson

The 10:30s continue to be popular with our volunteers. A few included Sharon Thomas potting rosemary and Loretta DiTocco talking about propagating succulents.





Lynn Bentley-Kemp's "What's Happening in the Garden" is always well attended and informative. The *Thank You* potluck lunch was well appreciated by the volunteers.

Work Around the Garden



Nell Smets and helpers have demolished the existing arbor that leads to the almond tree. Post holes were dug and posts set in concrete. Cedar elements will be cut and hopefully, within two or three weeks, the arbor will be completed. The family of Luke Touhill have agreed to donate the estimated cost of the arbor in his memory.



Carol Borland and friends worked on the Bosai on a chilly Monday.

*The overgrown *Thrinax Radiata* by the pavilion was dug out and will be replaced by crotons under the guidance of Lynne Bentley-Kemp.*



UN Sung HERO



Since 2001, The Community Foundation of the Florida Keys has been hosting an annual event to recognize the service of volunteers. Monroe County 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations are invited to

nominate one Unsung Hero to recognize that individual's unpaid contributions over the past year. Each Unsung Hero is presented with a certificate of appreciation at our celebratory luncheon and is recognized in all three editions of the *Keys Weekly*. Hannah Schenck was the Hero for the Gardens this year. A dedicated volunteer who works quietly in the background but gets things done and the plants thrive because of it.



Nell Smets is another outstanding Garden Club member and was awarded the Unsung Hero for the Orchid Society.

Congratulations to both members for all their hard work!



Special Events

The 70th Anniversary Gala portrayed the Key West Gardens in a beautiful light. This was a celebration of 70 years of the Garden Club and its care of Fort West Martello. Jane Tiedeman and an intrepid gang of volunteers did the wonderful Christmas decorations and lights.





This was such a lovely evening! Rosi Ware talked about the history of the Fort. Eloise and Chuck Pratt also had many memories. Eloise was clothed in period dress of the early Fort years. Irae Monte on violin and Crispin Campbell on cello added to the ambiance of the evening.



Kitty Somerville is modeling the retro T-shirt that was created for the 70th Anniversary.

In addition to her modeling career, Kitty and Pam Van Soest have started educational classes about orchid photography and mounting orchids. These have been sold out and the donations are split between the Club and the Orchid Society. They are planning more!

New WIFI

President Mary Olson has done a lot of research and, working with AT&T, has increased WIFI reception to cover the larger areas on the grounds. This should make it easier for vendors to use their devices for sales. This has been a problem that has plagued us for some time, and kudos to Mary for the solution.



Sharon Thomas Visit

Propagation hosted a get-together to reconnect with Sharon Thomas who visited the Keys for a few weeks. Sharon has moved to Colorado where she is continuing her efforts on her property to bring it back to a natural area. Sharon's expertise still helps out with the November Plant Sale and she gave an informative talk on rosemary at a 10:30. It is always great to see her and catch up.



Lending Library

The Club has proposed a Tool Lending Library for volunteers and for use by approved Employees. A Dewalt 20-volt hedge trimmer, pruner, reciprocating saw, wood-pruning saw blades and a 4-pack of batteries with charger. All tools will be locked in the dungeon when not in use. This will save wear and tear on members' tools that they often bring in.

Propagation Tiki

The Tiki in Propagation needs to be replaced as it has irreparable termite damage. Our wonderful "resident" architect, Nell Smets, has put together plans and work will begin soon. This is a vital part of Propagation as it allows some shade while plants are being potted and repotted. Any donations to this project would be appreciated. Plants grown in Propagation are sold at the November sale and throughout the year in the Courtyard, and helps our bottom line.



Fairy Wands

Carol Borland (Queen of the Fairy Wands) saw the idea of the wands online and came up with an inexpensive way to create them. She and Kitty and other members have been working their fingers to the bone. This "cottage industry" has been a wonderful boost to our revenue.

The fertilizer balls have also been selling well. A big thank you to Melanjia Borlja, a fantastic receptionist and fertilizer bagger. The wands and fertilizer bags will be for sale at the Orchid show in March.

We are also fortunate to have Karyn Bradshaw and Kari Tilson (Open Air Yoga) as hard-working receptionists. They make it a pleasure to visit the Gardens.

Master Gardener Tour

In February, Christa, Kitty, Hazel, Betty, Nikki and Jeanne led a field trip in our gardens for the new class of Master Gardener Interns. It was a tour to ID native and ornamental plants. There were 10 interns and Liah Continentino, the IFAS Horticulture agent. Our members, headed by Christa, provided a lesson on propagating Woolly Tea Bush cuttings. (*Melochia tomentosa*). This a Florida native and a super pollinator magnet. The group then had lunch in the dining room of the fort. It was a very successful outing.



National Historic Register

There was a meeting in Tallahassee and an online webinar on February 19th regarding some changes in the State Historical Designation. The Club obtained State Historical status in 1976, and we obtained National Historical Site designation shortly thereafter. This meeting revolved around damage that occurred during Hurricane Irma and the repairs done.

The conclusion was “The West Martello Tower” retains its integrity of design, as the structure and its character-defining features remain as they were when used as an armory. Alterations and repairs done with the grant funding were made in accordance with the Secretary of Interior’s Standards and with sensitivity to the structure’s character defining features, as reviewed by staff at the Florida State Division of Historic Resources.

We maintained our status with flying colors! Here are some interesting photos that they have in their archives.





Board Change

Sharon Lieberman has been our Treasurer for many years, even when she left the Keys for Pawley Island, NC. She has now retired as our Treasurer, and will be missed.

We are grateful that Nikki (Nicole) Ceurvorst has taken the position as our new Treasurer. Nikki has a strong background in finance and will be excellent in this new job.

Bench Dedication

We had a dedication ceremony of a bench and plaque in honor of Fran and Bill Ford on the hill by the white gazebo.

They were a wonderful, generous, colorful couple who did so much for the Community and the Garden Club.

The bench is up by the white gazebo and is a wonderful spot to sit and contemplate nature.



Many thanks for photo contributions from Kitty Somerville, Hazel Hans, Sue Sullivan, Nell Smets, Pam Van Soest and special thanks to Lynne Bentley-Kemp.

Thank you to Christa Varacalli for proofreading.

Sue Sullivan, Editor

