

Mature trees are taking root at the new Garden

BY CAROLYN MILLER Special to Florida Weekly



One of four mastic trees moved from the Conservancy is put in place at its new home at the Naples Botanical Garden. A veritable nursery's worth of mature trees from various locations around Collier County are taking root at the new Naples Botanical Garden. About 100 large trees and palms have been relocated to the Garden over the past two years as part of a major expansion and renovation project.

They've come from near and far: coconut and royal palms from a neighbor's yard around the corner; more than 40 palms, some as much as 50 years old, from Old Naples; three royal palms from Grey Oaks; and majestic trees from the East Trail and Oil Well Road. There's a massive gumbo limbo from Marco Island, and more than a dozen towering trees from the Nature Center at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, which is undergoing its own expansion and renovation. "Our neighbors and friends have embraced the project with their offerings," says Brian Holley, the Garden's executive director. "Trees of all sizes and shapes have come from people and organizations all over the region."

"We are humbled by this incredible generosity and know that these gifts are the result of the donors' nurturing spirit, which will forever be a part of the Garden."

Twenty-two of the latest crop of trees bound for the Garden were planted as seedlings more than 30 years ago along Oil Well Road and have been donated to the Garden by Barron Collier Companies.

And Collier Enterprises has donated a large kapok tree, a ficus, a sea grape and a soapberry tree from property it owns along the East Trail of U.S. 41.

As the Conservancy began to plan for the major greening of its campus as part of a \$33 million capital campaign, all trees on the Nature Center site were inventoried. A landscape architect, botanists and arborists were called in to help determine which trees would have to be removed or relocated.

The Garden provided the perfect location for a large number of trees that would have to be removed.

"The timing could not have been better," says Andrew McElwaine, Conservancy president and CEO.

Mr. Holley couldn't agree more. "Partnering with the Conservancy on this effort is what preservation, conservation and community is all about," he says.

The tree-moving project from Conservancy to Garden started June 18. The move was orchestrated by key personnel from both the Garden and the Conservancy, along with O'Donnell Landscaping and Ellin Goetz of Goetz + Stopes Landscape Architects.

The trees were prepared for the move to their new home by pruning the roots several feet from the trunk and then wrapping them in black cellophane and replanting for several days, during which time they were heavily watered to ensure that the soil around the root system remained intact.

On moving day, the 10- to 20-foot tall trees were laid flat and carefully strapped down on flatbed trucks, strategically placed to reduce the amount of limbs that need to be cut for the five-mile trip from the Conservancy Nature Center on Merrihue Drive to the Garden off Bayshore Drive.

Initial plans for the trees from the Conservancy at their new home at the Garden include placing a pop ash in the Vicky C. and David Byron Smith Children's Garden, four mastics in the Tropical Hardwood Hammock and the six gumbo limbos in natural areas throughout the Garden.

Firmly in place and being carefully cared for, the transplanted trees have several more months to establish their roots at the Garden before the weeklong grand opening celebration in November. Perhaps one of the best things about the gift of so many trees from so many in the community is that when opening day comes, visitors will be hard-pressed to identify which trees haven't been growing in the Garden forever.

Carolyn Miller is curator of collections at the Naples Botanical Garden. The new Garden will open to the public in November. For more information call 643-7275 or visit www.naplesgarden.org.