

# Naples Daily News

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## Naples Botanical Garden



The Brazilian Garden at Naples Botanical Garden features an original ceramic tile mural made by Roberto Burle Marx, known internationally as the "father of modern landscape architecture." The piece is the only Burle Marx mural in the United States. **Lexey Swall/Staff (2)**

## A GROWING GARDEN

Naples Botanical Garden reopens after 17 months of renovations, making its 70 developed acres the second-largest in Florida

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The Naples Botanical Garden reopens this Saturday in a huge way: It will come out of its 17-month hiatus as the second-largest developed botanical garden in the state, with 70 developed acres. After its final first-phase gardens are developed, possibly next year, it will likely be the largest.

Yet its beginnings were flower-pot size. A number of people on its first board remember

packing up their backyard plants to raffle when they needed to pay a lecture room rental fee.

"We had this free lecture series," recalled Susan Gallagher, one of the members of the original board. "They were to get people interested. And we'd have a plant raffle from things we brought in. There were enough plants so if you bought any tickets at all, you'd go home with a plant."

Win Turner, a landscaper, garden neighbor

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The Children's Garden, a new feature at the Naples Botanical Garden, has a playhouse set into a South Florida version of a cottage garden, with a tree house and a butterfly garden in a large open space where children 11 and under can play. The Botanical Garden opens to the public Saturday with 70 acres of new gardens including Brazilian Garden, Caribbean Garden and more.



## A unique place

When Naples Botanical Garden re-opens officially at 11 a.m. Saturday, it will be a trove of singular features, including:

■ **It is one of only two gardens in the world** holding every registered cultivar of plumeria (frangipani) in the world. The International Plumeria Society of America designated the garden, with its tropics-friendly climate, as one of the best places for them to grow.

■ **The garden has an uncounted, but vast, collection** of heliconia (bird of paradise) and a 550-square-foot orchid greenhouse and butterfly house with a substantial diversity of population as well. In the preserve that contains the uplands, the staff has cataloged 300 species of native plants.

■ **Its Children's Garden has two crayon-bright tree houses**, including one accessible to children in wheelchairs; it can be navigated on upper body strength.

■ **The garden's meeting point, a 8-by-17-foot**, wildly colorful tile mural, is thought to be the only one in a North American public space from Roberto Burle Marx, the Brazilian landscape architect and artist whose subtropical public garden designs stand as among the world's best.

Some of the garden's one-and-only features won't be so apparent:

■ **The garden is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification-ready.** The board worked with a firm known nationally for its sustainable architecture, Lake/Plato of San Antonio, Texas, and local general contractor Kraft Construction to recycle more than 75 percent of its construction waste, use more than 20-percent recycled building materials and maximize energy-efficient natural lighting in its design.

■ **The expanded garden has already received a national Intelligent Use of Water Leadership Award** for its water-saving processes. It will use an 18,000-gallon cistern to collect roof rainwater for irrigation and a parking lot with bioswales to handle runoff and a wide field filtering grasses to slow and scrub the water. Even urinals use a water-free process. A good sneak preview of parts of the garden and an explanation of how the system works is online at [www.rainbird.com/iuow/award.htm](http://www.rainbird.com/iuow/award.htm)

■ **This garden may be one of the few assembled under the joint efforts** of four internationally known landscape architects: Raymond Jungles of Miami, who is here today for a talk with the Naples Garden Club; Colorado-based Herb Schaal, who created its Children's Garden with input from local youngsters; and Bob Truskowski, of Laguna Beach, Calif., who designed the Caribbean Garden. Yet another famous landscaper, Made Wijaya, will design its Asian Garden. Ellin Goetz, the Naples landscape architect whose company has taken on weaving the borders of each garden to the next, has designed the future Florida Garden. Both are scheduled to be completed in 2010.



## Big, getting bigger

Naples Botanical Garden will open as the second-largest developed botanical garden in the state. When its final two gardens are finished next year, it will be the largest cultivated garden; Bok Tower in Lake Wales has more property, although much of it is in nature preserve.

**83 acres** — Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Coral Gables

**70 acres** — Naples Botanical Garden, Naples; it owns about 160 square acres

**61 acres** — Bok Tower Gardens Lake Wales; it owns nearly 250 square acres

**60 acres** — Flamingo Gardens & Wildlife Sanctuary, Davie

**15 acres** — Harry P. Leu Gardens, Orlando

**14 acres** — Mounts Botanical Garden, West Palm Beach

**9.5 acres** — Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Sarasota

Naples won't forget that the Naples Botanical Garden is opening next Saturday. It is "planting" reminders, via actors from the Living Garden, a botanically enhanced theater troupe that will be outdoors on Fifth Avenue from noon to 1 p.m. Tuesday, and at Coconut Point from noon to 1 p.m. and Waterside Shops from 2 to 6 p.m. Thursday.

**2nd Nature Productions**



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# A GROWING GARDEN



Judy Sproul, chairman of the board for the Naples Botanical Garden, stands in one of the garden's new features, the butterfly garden, which is located in the Children's Garden. The garden open to the public Saturday. **Lexey Swall/File**

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and volunteer since 1993, remembers organizing lawn-chair luaus to promote the concept, serving from a tent in his own backyard.

"The thing about it is — it wasn't that long ago that they were doing all this," marveled Brian Holley, executive director of the Naples Botanical Garden. He wasn't around for those first meetings in 1993, but acknowledged that small things will always undergird the marvels: Last Friday, garden staff and volunteers were out digging holes for 4,000 little filler plants.

Turner has been one of those digging sunup to sunset during the summer to put those little plants in. His family once owned much of the property that would become the garden at the intersection of Thomasson and Bayshore drives, then known as Kelly Road. There's a tone of relief in Turner's voice when he talks about their original idea, to turn it into a rock pit, before they sold their land for its next potential fate: as a low-density housing development. The first botanical garden board, thanks to a \$5 million gift from the late Harvey E. Kapnick, bought it instead, turning its half-formed strip mall into a headquarters from which to plan today's gardens.

It was the land's salvation, Turner asserts.

"This is so much better for it," he declared. "I can't believe it. It's like having a dream come true."

## Dreaming big

A number of people who were on the first board of the Naples Botanical Garden and who still volunteer today use Turner's word.

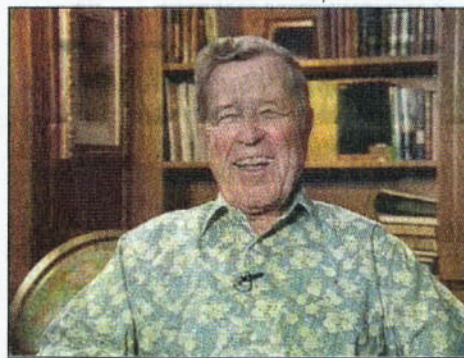
"It's like you're in the middle of a dream," said Connie Alsbrook. "It's hard to believe, when you're standing in the middle of it, and you worked so hard on it."

Alsbrook became one of the founding garden members by accident. Her husband, Everett, had joined several other enthusiasts who had organized a meeting in the Collier County Public Library to discuss the concept of a botanical garden. Then he was called out of town on the night of the first meeting.

"After the meeting, they asked anyone who was interested to stay around," she said. "My husband asked me to stay on top of what was happening, so I did."

She became board secretary during the garden's formative years. In fact, the garden's stand of coastal dune scrub, part of the David and Vicky Smith Uplands Preserve, may be there because of Alsbrook's insistence.

"I think I said something like, 'You're going to have to drive a tractor over me to tear that up,'" she admitted. "I grew up in



Harvey E. Kapnick, one-time chairman of Arthur Andersen LLP and later Chicago Pacific, donated the major gift, \$5 million, that enabled the Naples Botanical Garden to buy the 160-acre plus property it is located on now. He died in August 2002, within a year after the garden's opening in its much smaller developed area. **Provided by Naples Botanical Garden**

Florida, so I understood that we already had a garden planted there."

Alsbrook calls that scrub, with palmettos, silky sand and high elevation, the Florida equivalent of desert — a terrain that's increasingly rare because it is so easy to develop into housing. Undisturbed, it is an area that is home to sand live oak and gopher tortoises.

But she and many of the other people who got the initial Tropical Mosaic Garden in admitted they needed a change to grow from the 25-foot starter garden.

"It started with people whose passion was plants — people with dirt under our fingernails," recalled Catherine Ware, who joined the board later as secretary. "We got it started but didn't have the skills to take it to the next level."

She credits the success in developing the garden that opens this week to the Kapnick gift that purchased plenty of property, the addition of business-savvy board members and the hiring of Holley, former director of the Cleveland Botanical Garden. Had the board not campaigned to have the money in hand before it built, this would not have been possible, she said. The board did decide to delay completion of two more gardens — the Asian and Florida gardens — after the 2008 stock market fiasco.

"Giving really did dry up," she said. "We had to not scale back our long-term projects, but slow them down a little."

Some of the people who dreamed about his date will not see it, she and other board members pointed out: Robert W. Read, a retired botanist from the Smithsonian Institution, its first chairman, and one of the first advocates for a botanical garden in Naples; Charles Berger, under whose board chairmanship the expansion began in 2008; Wilma Ferguson, its first vice-president,

and Beverley McHugh, another early board member.

Others are still with it, however. Duane Repp, a retired generator builder who was on the board before there was a garden, is retraining as a docent for the expanded area.

"One of the things that struck me at first was that this thing is so huge you'll never be able to walk around it all in one visit," recalled Repp, who remembers feeling momentarily piqued at the idea. "But that's kind of the idea, I realized. You'll want to come back and see other areas of it."

## Giving back in a big way

Harvey Kapnick would have been proud of the gardens that are opening Saturday, said his son, Scott Kapnick, a part-time Naples resident for around 30 years now. Scott and Kathleen Kapnick and the Kapnick Foundation followed his lead with their own \$10 million gift in 2006 that ensured the development of the garden.

"My father was a huge believer in giving back to the communities where he lived," Scott Kapnick said. "He felt Naples was in need of protecting some of its open spaces, and he saw in this property an opportunity to develop a world-class botanical garden."

"When he passed away, Kathleen and I made the decision to take this on, to see it to the next stage. We're certainly proud of the contribution he made and the vision he had for this garden," he continued. "For me it's (the opening) is going to be emotional to a certain extent."

The elder Kapnick also saw the potential of partnering with Florida Gulf Coast University, his son added. As a result, FGCU is erecting its environmental studies field laboratory/classroom adjacent to the gift shop and administration building. It's expected to open in February, making the garden a destination for researchers and academic events as well as a place for the public to enjoy and appreciate nature.

"I can't overemphasize how beautiful it is. And to have the talents of several first-class landscape architects in one place is incredibly good fortune in creating of the kind of garden this should be," Kapnick said.

"A lot of people either don't understand or underestimate that the garden is a world-class tropical garden," he said. "It's amazing to me we have so many different flowers, plants and trees in such an early stage of development."

"For myself and Kathleen it's one of the most important things we've done in our lives. It's one of those things that goes beyond whatever you're doing now and will be an important, and permanent, part of the future of Naples."