

Community garden springing up at park

BY EILEEN SOLER, The Miami Herald

A community garden is taking root in Miramar, but those who want to do more than admire the greenery will have to pitch in.

"You have to work the garden to reap its bounty -- it's sweat equity," said Mayor Lori Moseley, who had the idea for the city's first neighborhood garden.

Residents have already begun work on a 5,200-square-foot plot at Fairway Park to grow everything folks need for soups, salads, side dishes and seasonings.

A team of workers from the city's Public Works Department turned out several days last week to lay an irrigation system and erect fencing.

Earlier, children from the after-school program at Fairway Park Community Center just a short walk away, planted seedlings of Florida's state wildflower: *Coreopsis Floridana* or Florida tickseed, to root indoors. Later, the flowers will line the garden fence to attract butterflies, birds and insects to help with plant pollination.

Tomatoes, lettuce, collard greens, radishes, sweet potatoes, peppers, summer beans and a variety of herbs were expected to be planted May 22 by about 25 volunteers.

Miramar's Development and Capital Management Coordinator Elsi Rose, who is part of the city's Green Champions employee group, said the garden was green before plants were planted.

Architectural plans for preparing and planting the land for "decentralized urban farming" came free from architect Michael Madfis of the Madfis Group based in Fort Lauderdale, Rose said.

Madfis, accredited by the U.S. Green Building Council in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), also provided instructions for a successful and sustainable edible garden in the midst of a concrete city.

Whole Foods Market in Fort Lauderdale, Ana G. Mendez University and Spirit Airlines, both in Miramar, are sponsors of the project. Also on board is the new Miramar Cafe, which will create dishes for its menu using the garden's home-grown vegetables and herbs.

Plastic barrels will collect rainwater for supplementing city-provided irrigation. Compost stations will reuse vegetation to create organic fertilizer.

"Everything is green about the garden. Even the fence is repurposed," said Rose, who is also LEED-accredited.

Indeed, most of the 345 linear feet of chain link fence used to secure the garden was pulled from the city's former police headquarters on Miramar Parkway just west of Douglas Road. The rest of the fence was donated by volunteer Jim Green, owner of Coral Fence in Sebring.

"When I heard the fence was for a community garden I wanted to be part of it," Green said. When Green delivered the fence, he rolled up his sleeves to help install it.

Luke Gbenro, a Public Works employee whose work schedule includes Fairway Park, said he pays extra attention to the land where his garden grows.

He's hoping to someday help harvest a crop of carrots and tomatoes -- his two favorite vegetables. "I'm going to nurture the garden, protect it and watch it grow," Gbenro said. "Then I'll help eat it."

(cont.)



Volunteers from the residential and business communities eagerly filled and planted almost 700 raised planter-bags. They came together to build the community garden -- digging, drilling, shoveling, painting, planting and more.

SELF-GUIDED TOURS



Self guided tours are a feature of the new garden. Plantings include: Everglades Tomato, Peppers, Malanga; Pigeon Peas; Sweet Potato; Callaloo, Collard Greens, Eggplant, Okra, Tomatillo, Watermelon, Basil, Mint, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Sage, Tarragon, Dwarf Banana, Papaya, and Yucca.