The Serenity Garden
At
Wekiwa Springs State Park
Why?

• Florida has 175 very diverse state parks and trails covering more than 800,000 acres.
• They attract 32 million visitors, yet many areas of the parks are inaccessible to large groups of people and, as a result, they are unable to benefit from the many advantages of just being in a natural environment...

and thus, the Serenity Garden at Wekiwa Springs
What is the Serenity Garden?

The 1.5-acre Serenity Garden at Wekiwa Springs State Park – the only one of its kind in the U.S. – is an innovative approach to expanding access and enhancing the quality of the park experience for visitors with diverse abilities and special needs.
• **A HEALING GARDEN** is a garden or landscape designed for a specific population, place, and intended positive health outcome. Garden users include patients or residents, visitors and staff.

• **A REHABILITATION GARDEN, THERAPEUTIC, or ENABLING GARDEN** is a garden where physical, occupational, horticultural, and other therapies take place.

• **A RESTORATIVE GARDEN** or **LANDSCAPE FOR HEALTH** is any landscape – wild or designed, large or small – that facilitates human health and well-being.

The **Serenity Garden** is the only one of its kind anywhere in the United States that incorporates all these aspects.
Based on the Principles of Therapeutic Horticulture

Therapeutic Horticulture is a process in which plants and gardening activities are used to improve the body, mind and spirit, through passive or active involvement.

Therapeutic Horticulture:

Is effective and beneficial for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.
Helps improve memory, cognitive abilities, task initiation, language skills, and socialization.
In physical rehabilitation, it can help strengthen muscles and improve coordination, balance, and endurance.
In vocational horticultural therapy settings, people learn to work independently, problem solve, and follow directions.
Therapeutic Horticulture & The Seven Principles of Universal Design

• Equitable Use
• Flexibility in Use
• Simple and Intuitive
• Perceptible Information
• Tolerance for Error
• Low Physical Effort
• Appropriate Size and Space
Important elements

• Safety – both the perception of and actual safety and comfort are essential in therapeutic gardens.

• Good design and proper maintenance can address challenges such as climatic extremes, inclement weather, pollen, and harmful bacteria and insects. For example, a choice of sun and shade enables users to be outside throughout the day.

• Covered seating areas, especially at the garden entrance, allow even the frailest of users access even when the weather is not ideal.
Why access to nature is important

We know that access to nature:

promotes health through *reduction in* stress, depression, myopia, pain, fatigue, aggression, impulsivity, and symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD);

*Improves* immune function, bone strength, wound healing, cognition, concentration, emotional resilience, empathy, vitality, relaxation, mood, and satisfaction.
According to Roger Ulrich’s Theory of Supportive Garden Design (1999), therapeutic gardens should provide:

1) nature engagement (plants, animals, water, fresh air)
2) a sense of control (for example, doorways that are easily navigable, and areas where people can find privacy)
3) opportunities for social support, and
4) opportunities for movement and exercise.
The Inspiration – meet John Leaman
Building the team

- Therapeutic Horticultural Expert – Dr. Amy Wagenfeld
- Occupational Therapists – Advent Health & Adventist University
- Master Gardeners – Seminole & Orange County
- Native Plant Nurseries
- Landscape Design Consultants
- Representatives from disabled and special needs groups
- Support organizations – gardening clubs, volunteer groups
The Design Phase

- Took over two years – and many, many meetings - to complete
- Involved more than 17 focus groups
- Studies by Adventist University of Health Services
- Detailed budgeting
Choosing a site in the park

• It had to be on ‘disturbed land’
• It had to be close to the parking lot
• It had to be close to restroom facilities
• It had to be large enough to incorporate all our design elements
The site – January 2018
One day soon
Overcoming the Challenges
Elevation
Analysis:
The garden layout set by the final conceptual design is able to be worked into the terrain while maintaining fully-accessible slopes. However, a noticeable amount of re-grading will be necessary to meet the needs of maintaining the garden walkways through the site.

Please be aware of the following standards and caveats:
1. While every effort will be made to retain all existing oil quality vegetation within the site boundaries, the re-contouring of the site may require some previously unexpected removal.
2. Cross slopes on longitudinal walks and for all directions on plaza spaces will not exceed 2%.
3. Longitudinal slopes will not exceed 6% - 7.5%.
4. The existing parking spaces on the southwest side of the site will need to be removed in order to sufficiently grade from the edge of the parking drive side down to the rear garden walkway.
5. The pedestrian connection suggested in the conceptual design along the southwesterly side of the garden can be achieved if a 2'-6" high retaining wall is incorporated into the slope in the area of the removed parking spaces.

A permits connection can be achieved if an incorporated a 2'-6" retaining wall.

5 parking spaces will be removed to allow the garden糙; 4.4% slope will be required.
Boardwalks & Paths
The Cathedral
## WSSG Garden Area and Room Concepts

### January 2018

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| seating variety | }
Who will we serve

Working with educational, healthcare and social service and horticultural partners, the garden is designed to create a unique sensory experience for vulnerable populations and groups with special needs such as fragile seniors, people in wheelchairs, veterans with PTSD, people with autism, and those with chronic conditions, as well as their families and caregivers.
A Park within a Park – Making history

• The only one of its kind in the United States
• Supported by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection
• Endorsed by almost all local and state civic leaders & legislators
• Backed by all the leading groups working with people with disabilities and special needs
• Meeting the unique needs of veterans with PTSD is one of many goals associated with the Serenity Garden.

• According to the American Psychological Association, symptoms associated with PTSD include intense feelings of fear and anxiety, which may lead individuals with this disorder to avoid people, places, or situations that could cause them to re-experience the trauma.

• Natural and built elements, such as myriad plant material, soothing water features, ample seating from which to observe the garden, gentle curving pathways with no blind corners, and clear site-lines that enable veterans to see the entirety of the garden are intended to provide a peaceful and calming experience not only for veterans, but all who visit.
While there are various theories why nature is so helpful, there is no variance on the outcomes. We know that viewing plants, flowers, water, and other nature elements, watching butterflies and listening to birds reduces anxiety, even if that person was very anxious.

The benefits of nature hold even for confirmed city dwellers. In a study of cardiac patients in New York who were shown various scenes, anxiety was reduced the most in those who saw a nature scene and heard a soundtrack of water, birds, and breezes.
• Gardens promote exercise. Even mild exercise elevates mood. Gardens motivate people to explore once there.

• Gardens promote serenity and spiritual wellbeing. For many people, being in nature and interacting with the natural world, brings a sense of peace, tranquility, and feelings of connectedness - with self, others and a higher power.

• Gardens encourage social interaction. Social support enhances immune functions, promotes better moods, and produces better treatment compliance. Gardens encourage this interaction if they are easily.
• Gardens enhance a sense of control. We all need to feel that we have choices about what we can do, and gardens enhance that by offering a variety of spaces to choose from-some private and some open, some sunny, some shady, some with background sounds, some without etc.

• Gardens provide distractions, reduce stress, and promote a sense of wellbeing. This leads to measurable psychological, physiological, and behavioral benefits, such as reduced anxiety, sadness, and other negative moods, lower blood pressure and improved immune functioning, and better compliance with treatment protocol.
Design elements

• Primary colors can be divided into warm (red, orange, yellow) and cool (green, blue, violet).

• Cool colors are more soothing. You can use a warm color for accent or focal point, but use only one plant, or less than five percent of the overall design.

• Use tints (lighter) or shades (darker) of the above primary cool colors, or pastels (light combinations of colors).
• Avoid white, as it is a powerful color attracting your attention and creating divisions among other colors. Grays or silvers are more calming.

• When combining colors, use adjacent ones on the color wheel such as green and blue, or blue and violet. These create interest, yet are more serene than contrasting opposite colors such as blue and yellow.

• Similar to color, avoid large contrasts in other design principles such as heights and textures. Plants of a more uniform height are more soothing than big ones next to little ones. Texture is the visual appearance plants create, such as a fine texture from tiny leaves or ferns, or coarse texture from large leaves.
• Curves and rounded lines are more soothing than sharp, straight edges and geometric shapes important for making edges to beds and borders, or paths.

• Beds that are rounded or versions of ellipses, such as a kidney-shaped island bed for perennials, are more soothing than square or rectangular beds.

• The sound of gentle water is soothing and acts as a guide for the visually-impaired.

• Scent is the most powerful sense and is essential in the garden. Some scents such as lavender can physically help you relax from breathing their essential oils.

• The sense of touch is also important especially plants with soft, velvety leaves.
• Finally, the garden must be surrounded by a thick hedge of plants to provide both a visual and sound barrier to the outside world. This means of escape, of shutting out the chaos and distractions, is crucial.

• The garden must have ease of access, comfortable seating, safe walking surfaces and provide some protection from the sun. The garden must have adequate sunlight, the right soil, irrigation and a team of volunteers willing to maintain it.

• It must be close to parking and rest room facilities.

That is what the Serenity Garden aims to achieve
Site clearing
Programs already held onsite

- Yoga and tai chi classes
- Bird watching for the visually impaired
- Art classes for dementia patients
- Tours for residents at assisted living facilities
- LIFE program
- Nature’s orchestra for special needs children
Cost

- From conception through the design process the garden has grown both in complexity and size – from half an acre to 1-5 acres.
- Final costs are around $2 million ($600K for board walks and paths, $600K to replace the 1970’s restrooms, $400K for an endowment to cover ongoing maintenance and to provide two annual scholarships)
- Design costs of $120K have been paid and an additional $450K has been raised.
- The plan is to build the gardens in phases
Next steps

Continue to fund raise – the whole project has a $1.8 million price tag

Start work on phase 1 – terracing, retaining walls and paths

Plan for phase 2 – replacing rest rooms and incorporating adult changing facilities
The Serenity Garden is a unique project that aims to serve as a sanctuary for a largely underserved population throughout Central Florida.

We hope that it will become the model for similar gardens in parks and public spaces not only in the U.S. but around the world.

As such it deserves all our support.

One of our supporters!
How you can help

Volunteering
• Assisting with garden construction and ongoing maintenance
• Serving on one of the Garden’s many committees
• Training as a garden docent/guide

Spreading the Word
• Letting people know about the project (word of mouth, social media etc.
• Advocating for the Garden and all the benefits it will provide

Donations and Fund-raising
For more information go to
Please call or email:
Don Philpott
321-277-8442
dp@donphilpott.com

Thank you!