



City Horticulturist Eric Kohnen plants trees throughout Gainesville and manages the 175 plants at the Edible Groves.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF GAINESVILLE

SPIRIT AWARD

City's Efforts Bear Fruit

Gainesville provides fresh food in public spaces

by Brandy Stone and Suzette Cook
City of Gainesville



GAINESVILLE
Alachua County
Pop. 143,835

Access to affordable, fresh, quality food is a challenge many communities across the country face. While the **City of Gainesville** has established successful community gardens in multiple locations, neighbors expressed a desire to see more city-owned property used for edible plantings. In 2021, the City took an additional step to address the public health concern through establishing the Edible Groves Program.

From the feedback collected through public outreach, city staff created an interdepartmental team including Communications; Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs; Public Works; Strategic Initiatives; and Sustainable Development to make the vision of neighbors come to fruition. Staff identified the public spaces best suited for the Edible Groves. After much consideration, two municipal parks and one greenway were selected: Fred Cone Park, Smokey Bear Park and “Bountiful Boulevard.”

City Horticulturist Eric Kohnen worked with local specialists to generate a list of fruit-bearing species of trees and bushes. Kohnen determined what would be planted at each site, purchased the trees and planted them with the assistance of equipment and staff from Public Works. The Fred Cone Park groves were the first site, followed by Smokey Bear and Bountiful Boulevard.

About 175 fruit and nut trees have been planted across the sites. Species available include plum, persimmon, pear, nectarine, fig and chestnut, among many others. Hundreds of people have visited the locations, either passersby who stumbled upon the groves when visiting, or those who learned about Edible Groves and sought it out.

While traditional methods of increasing food access tend to be retail-focused, the Edible Groves Program takes an innovative



Information about the Edible Groves is displayed at each location with a QR code that leads to the program website.



Everbearing Mulberry trees at Smokey Bear Park.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF GAINESVILLE

approach to tackle the complex issue. Neighbors are encouraged to take as many fruits as they need and leave some for others. Not only is the produce free, but the Edible Groves provide a destigmatized way of obtaining healthy food. The groves were placed on both the east and west sides of Gainesville in areas with families and children who are likely to frequent community spaces such as parks. Additionally, the team was able to develop a significant grove in a geographic area not previously thought by most to be well-suited to growing fruit trees.

Kohnen said, “The Edible Groves program provides me a unique opportunity to utilize my horticultural knowledge to increase public access to healthy food, especially in areas where access is limited.”

Along with the personal benefit to neighbors, the Edible Groves Program positively contributes to environmental sustainability. The outcomes include increased urban forest canopy and species diversity, lowered heat-island effect, absorption of carbon dioxide and increased oxygen production.

In addition to the work provided by city staff, community partnerships have ensured the continued success of the Edible Groves Program. A local nonprofit, **Keep Alachua County Beautiful**, will provide volunteers to water and prune the trees as needed as the plants grow. The **University of Florida Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences** Master Gardener Volunteer Program contributed to the groves by developing informational resources about the species planted at each location that will be featured on the City’s website.

The program continues to thrive thanks to the dedication of the City Horticulturist. In just the first year, the peach, pear, nectarine and mulberry trees produced fruit. A community

member who was particularly fond of the fruit selection said, “I am thrilled with this project! I am a forager, and I’ve harvested loquats and wild grapes along 75th Street. I think the variety that is being planted is splendid.” At Smokey Bear Park, the tree trunks have grown to almost twice as thick, and trees have nearly doubled in height and produced shoots.

The City has received positive feedback from elected officials as well.

Gainesville Mayor Lauren Poe said, “This is one more way the City is working to build a sustainable community for the future. The trees not only provide a healthy, locally grown source of food, but they also offer shade, clean the air we breathe and help increase the diversity of species in the area. The benefits are countless.”

The program is financially supported by the City’s Tree Mitigation fund and the Wild Places and Public Places sales tax. **Gainesville Interim City Manager Cynthia W. Curry** expects the program to expand, and future locations are under consideration.

“This is a win-win for our neighbors and a fitting use of tree mitigation funds,” Curry said.

The Edible Grove Program demonstrates the ability of a local municipality to address a need of neighbors strategically. City leaders are excited to continue to see this program grow for years to come.

Brandy Stone is the Community Health Director with Gainesville Fire Rescue and former Civic Collaboration Specialist for the City of Gainesville. Suzette Cook is a Communications Specialist Senior with Gainesville Regional Utilities and former Marketing and Communications Specialist for the City. 

Gainesville Wins a Florida Municipal Achievement Award

The **City of Gainesville** recently received the **Florida League of Cities City Spirit Award**.

The award recognizes a specific citywide effort that successfully addresses a local need. Gainesville’s Edible Groves Program seeks to improve access to fresh produce in parts of the City that have low access to healthy food, encourage visits to City parks and community spaces and increase knowledge of food-bearing plants and trees that are well-adapted to the City’s local environment.

Local historian Seth Bramson in a Florida East Coast Railway uniform at a collaborative Historic Preservation Month event.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BROCKWAY MEMORIAL LIBRARY

CITIZENSHIP AWARD

Beyond the Bookshelves

Inspiration to learn about Miami Shores Village history and why it matters

by Michelle Brown
Miami Shores Village



MIAMI SHORES VILLAGE
Miami-Dade County
Pop. 11,548

Brockway Memorial Library, in the heart of Miami Shores Village, strives to be a point of connection between generations. Partnering with local historians, educators, storytellers and guides, the Library is an avenue for their passion for local history and a gathering place for learning about this unique locality.

A community resource since 1949, the Library acquired the Village’s historical holdings in 2002 and took on the role as a conduit for the Village’s historic preservation efforts. The archive serves as the area’s main resource for those seeking information about Miami Shores Village, which celebrates its 90th anniversary this year.

Over the years, the Library has tapped into the expertise of locals like **Seth Bramson**, a lecturer at Barry University and a prolific Florida history book author; **Paul George**, Ph.D., a Miami native and author who specializes in Florida’s historic

neighborhoods and landmarks; **John Bachay**, a Miamian for over 40 years who is also a local tour guide and facilitator for local historic designations; **Kimberly Logan-Hynes**, a trained preservationist and volunteer in the Library’s Archives; and **Patrizia Bonaduce**, a member of the **Miami Shores Village Historic Preservation Board**. Bonaduce’s love of local architecture has taken residents to the next level of discovering the beauty of the Village’s private residences.

The variety of programs stemming from these collaborations has served to raise awareness, educate and encourage civic engagement. Dynamic exhibits, lectures and interactive experiences have inspired the community to take an active interest in learning and provided opportunities to discover, be informed about and physically explore the area’s rich history.

INSPIRATION, INNOVATION AND VISION

Bonaduce was inspired by the 1987 Miami Shores Thematic Group nomination proposal for the National Register of Historic Places, which details the location, origins, survey information, setting and local stylistic features of the earliest homes of Miami Shores. She immersed herself in researching these homes and walked 2.5 square miles of residential sections of “the Village Beautiful.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIAMI SHORES BEAUTIFUL HISTORIC HOUSES, PATRIZIA BONADUCE



Historic Homes Walking Tour.

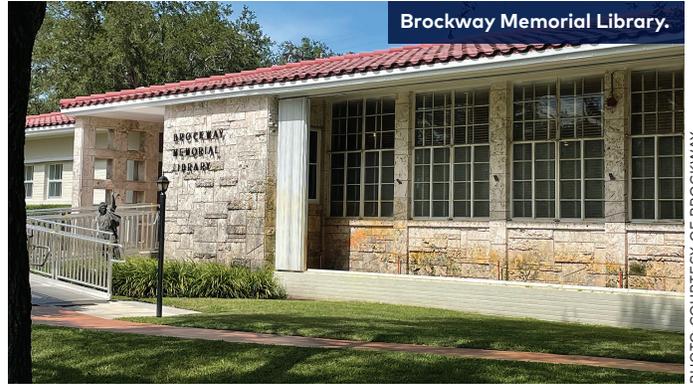
These efforts led her to create a database of more than 3,000 single-family Shores houses. Bonaduce classified, color-coded and mapped each by the date built. She focused on houses from the 1920s and 1930s that had already been designated historical, either nationally or locally. This database marked the first time such information had been digitally cataloged in an accessible format that could reach an audience ranging from young children to seniors, thus extending the lifespan of this essential information for future generations.

In honor of Historic Preservation Month 2021, Bonaduce and fellow Historic Preservation Board members **Wesley Castellanos** and **Michelle Headley** offered a series of walking tours. These tours gave participants a close-up view of the historical homes on Northeast 96th, 100th and 101st streets that are detailed on the maps. Tour participants were given a front-row seat to these local treasures.

Many homeowners shared stories about their homes and entertained questions. Each owner received a yard sign noting their home's significance, which is a source of pride for those residents who still put out their signs each May.

Closing out the celebration, Bonaduce donated the database and related tour route information as a permanent offering to the archives. The guides have since been adapted to be used for self-guided tours. Like many of the Library's local history programs, they encourage those with little awareness of local history to take a closer look – sparking the joy of discovery. To quote community advocate **Roni Bennett**, Executive Director of the **South Florida People of Color**, such programs “serve as an effort to open up dialogues among members of communities about our shared history.”

These offerings were made possible through the passion and personal dedication of citizens who sought out the Library as



Brockway Memorial Library.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BROCKWAY MEMORIAL LIBRARY

a pathway for civic engagement. With the help of friends like Bonaduce, Bramson, Bachay and others, Brockway has been a channel for history. The Library has reached hundreds of patrons and inspired residents to learn more about where they live and the stories behind its people and places.

The success of these programs confirms that every community can benefit from the people within it. It also demonstrates how libraries can provide enrichment and knowledge in exciting ways that make an impact beyond the bookshelves. Libraries provide a sense of belonging and a foundation from which to build a vision. They are the bridge to the past and the gateway to the future.

Michelle Brown is the Library Director for the Brockway Memorial Library in Miami Shores Village. 



Eryn Russell (third from right), Florida League of Cities Membership Program Specialist, presents the Florida Citizenship Award to Councilmember Crystal Wagar (from left), Vice Mayor Daniel Marinberg, Mayor Sandra Harris, Library Director Michelle Brown, Councilmember Katia Saint Fleur and Councilmember Alice Burch.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIAMI SHORES VILLAGE

Miami Shores Village Wins a Florida Municipal Achievement Award

Miami Shores Village recently received the **Florida League of Cities Florida Citizenship Award**.

The award recognizes a city project or program that increases civic awareness and education and promotes active participation in local government among residents. Brockway Library: A Conduit for Historic Preservation is a robust program that provides a rich offering of resources, including a digitized archive, ongoing lectures, community discussions, tours and exhibits.

Darryl Johnson works on the ropes course at Florida Elks Youth Camp in Umatilla.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF ORLANDO

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Orlando Shares Outdoor Adventures

Program educates and exposes students to new activities

by Tara Russakov
City of Orlando



ORLANDO
Orange County
Pop. 314,506

The **City of Orlando's** Sustainability Adventure Program (SAP) has allowed many students, including **Hardy Merisier**, to enjoy outdoor activities such as camping for the first time. "I had also never fished before," Hardy said. "I learned all the techniques, and I believe I would be able to fish by myself now if I want to."

Camping and fishing are just two of the incredible outdoor adventures found in Florida's extensive span of state and local parks. They offer an abundance of natural landscapes teeming with wildlife. The state's diverse ecosystems range from over 1,300 miles of coastline to the many lakes, rivers, springs and wetlands interwoven through its center and northern section.

Florida also offers a wide range of environmental careers

working with the state's rich natural resources. Although environmental organizations have focused on increasing diversity and inclusion in the field for decades, desired progress remains elusive. The population of ethnic minorities in the United States is growing, but ethnic minorities remain underrepresented in the environmental workforce.

SAP was created to provide enriching outdoor adventures to minority students from the City's Parramore and Holden Heights communities. The program is made possible through a grant from the **Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**. Middle and high school students involved in the City's Parramore Kidz Zone and Holden Heights Kidz Zone youth programs participate in outdoor adventures in a safe and fun way.

The program’s mission is to create outdoor experiences for students while providing education about sustainability initiatives and green careers throughout Florida.

Since its launch in November 2021, SAP has embarked on eight weekend camping trips and 15 day trips. Each of the outings is aligned with one of **Mayor Buddy Dyer’s Green Works Orlando** initiative’s sustainability focus areas such as clean energy, water, green buildings, local food, livability, transportation or zero waste. A primary objective of the program is to expose youth to the work that is being done to advance sustainability in Florida and to introduce them to diverse “green” careers.

The first SAP camping trip was hosted at the City’s Bill Frederick Park on 183 acres along Turkey Lake, a fishing lake that is rated among the top five in the state. During the trip, SAP students received fishing lessons from agents with the **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission** and discussed career opportunities.

Dyer and **Commissioner Bakari F. Burns** joined in on the fun and fished with students and staff. Additional activities that first weekend included disc golf instructions and a game with semi-pro golfer **Mark Janssen**, as well as hands-on education about nocturnal wildlife with professionals from the Orlando Science Center.

Students had another overnight opportunity when they traveled to the Tampa Bay area to visit The Florida Aquarium and Tampa Bay Seawater Desalination facility. They learned firsthand about the work being done for wildlife and water conservation. At the Aquarium, students completed a scavenger hunt that guided them through ecosystem exhibits. At the desalination plant, students learned about **Tampa Bay Water’s** efforts to produce drinking water from seawater using reverse osmosis. The group spent the weekend camping and fishing at Masonic Park and Youth Camp in **Wimauma**.

The SAP program was initially created to get students outdoors and educate them on sustainability and the environment. However, program leaders have found other ways for students to benefit from the program. Students were given the opportunity to challenge their physical and mental fitness and improve their team-building skills on a ropes course at Florida Elks Youth Camp in **Umatilla**. They also visited The Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes, where they learned how to grow their own food through a tour of the facility’s on-site gardens. Students then made a healthy salad.

For many of the youth, SAP gives them an opportunity to experience the outdoors for the first time. Some of those first-time experiences have included canoeing, rock climbing, zip lining and making s’mores. Students have also enjoyed airboat rides in central Florida lakes, encounters with their favorite animals and daytrips to local theme parks and attractions.

As SAP closes out its inaugural year, program leaders and participants are looking ahead to other places and activities to explore. The program’s leaders are looking forward to students embarking on many more adventures that will further connect them to their natural world and help build a more sustainable Orlando for the future.

Tara Russakov is the Marketing/Communications Manager with the City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department. 



Michael Hawkins snorkels for the first time at Alexander Springs as part of the Sustainability Adventure Program.



Students in the Sustainability Adventure Program discover marine life as they learn about monitoring and conservation efforts.



Staff member Brittany Koziara assists Sustainability Adventure Program participant Kali Drummond as he masters the knots needed to attach a hook to his fishing line.

Orlando Wins a Florida Municipal Achievement Award

The **City of Orlando** recently received the **Florida League of Cities Environmental Stewardship Award**.

The Environmental Stewardship Award recognizes a city program that promotes conservation, improves and protects environmental conditions and/or provides environmental education and outreach programs. The Kidz Zone Sustainability Adventure Program provides Orlando youth from some of the City’s lowest income neighborhoods an opportunity to learn about sustainability principles and implementation and participate in hands-on service projects that improve the local environment while they explore potential career paths.