

## The Seed of an Idea Grows Into Reality...

As with so many great ideas, serendipity played a role in this one, too. Bill Papp, board member for WCID 132, and Michael Murr, a local landscape consultant, became acquainted through the Authority's Water Conservation Committee. As the group discussed the alarming fact that 50-70% of a resident's water usage takes place outside, it sparked the two to begin exploring the concept of a local water provider demonstrating the many ways that smart landscaping techniques can help use water more efficiently.

Michael, previously a Facilities and Operations Manager for Compaq Computer Corporation's award-winning, natural environment headquarters, is a recognized leader in creating and sustaining landscapes that work with indigenous environments. He is also the recipient of the Texas Corporate Recycling Council's Environmental Vision Award and the Conservation Leadership Award from the Nature Conservancy of Texas.

The idea germinated as the utility district's board members explored the feasibility of utilizing a portion of their water plant acreage for a demonstration conservation garden.

"Once the board saw a concept plan of what we proposed," Murr explained, "they couldn't wait to get it in the ground. The process took longer than expected, but it needed to be right. We also had to deal with good old Mother Nature's seasonal constraints along the way. I made sure I had the next step ready to go in order to update the board at each meeting."

Michael admits there was extra research to get everything exactly right; to make sure this would be an educational tool, not just a garden. He established a partner-

ship with Rainbird and the company donated the irrigation components used throughout the garden.

The materials had to be staged on site in the order they would be used, so the railroad ties were delivered first. Wood and metal edging designated where walkways and the beds would be developed. The time-consuming process of the actual layout had to take into consideration what occurs naturally on the site in the way of shade patterns and drainage.

One of the garden's amenities -- the arbor -- was designed both for shade and for function, encompassing the sign and framing the garden as the entry point of the site. The arbor is constructed out of red cedar and will provide shade and support for the evergreen wisteria.

Once the layout was complete, both a conventional irrigation system and a conservative/bubbling system were installed. Trenches crossed the pathways and tied into the overall design of the garden, with the wiring centralized at the controller. Soon after, with the system arranged into zones, the lateral water lines were connected to the main lines and buried.

It was then time for a weed barrier to be installed to inhibit the unwanted vegetation from growing through the beds and special granite walkway medium. Compost was then added to the beds ready for the planting.

Time to bring in the plants! When they arrived, they were placed, still in their pots, for a final look before planting. Satisfied that the arrangement was right, they were then put into place and watered immediately to conform to their new environment. Decorative boulders were added, and flagstone paths allowed access to areas off the walk-





ways. Split rail fences were also added for aesthetics and as a climbing device adjacent to vines that will eventually attach themselves to the fences. Now, as it was throughout the design of the garden, the natural environment was kept in perspective.

Individual signs were placed throughout the garden to identify most of the plant material as well as its water use and sun orientation -- each sign describing the growth pattern, size, color and usage of the plant material.

Sago Palms were donated by one of the board members and now flank the mulch bins located on the grounds. Sagos, once established in this shady situation, will become less dependant on the larger amount of water required in full sun.

In addition to the mulch area, there is also an area dedicated to showing samples of three popular turf grasses used in the design and installation of the garden -- St. Augustine, Bermuda and Zoysia.

A complete new wrought iron fence has also been installed for security, aesthetics, and insurance purposes.

Now that the initial phase of the project is complete, the WCID 132 Board of Directors is pleased to make the garden available to their customers, neighboring subdivisions, the community, local schools, educators and youth and civic groups as a place to learn about preserving and protecting our precious water resources, and as a place to relax and enjoy nature.

According to Bill Papp, "This has been a truly enriching experience. We have all learned so much about smart landscaping, and could not be more delighted with this wonderful garden that we hope people will enjoy for years to come." 💧

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*Left to right, WCID 132 Board members Michael Armstrong, Barbara Knutson, Thomas Mancini, Gary Toll, and Bill Papp.*



*"Now that it's finished, I am delighted that the Board has hired my firm to take care of the garden. I promised them that I will maintain it the way they conceived it... the way I designed it... and most importantly, the way they want it to look down the road. This is an investment on behalf of -- and for -- their constituents and this community. They are wise to keep their vision sharp and their investment well-maintained ."*

*Michael Murr*