



's News

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Gardening Helps Students' Skills Blossom



FACE student MiKayla waters a group of plants outside on the school's campus. The plants are part of a new community garden project helping the students learn at FACE.

Emanating outside of the Florida Autism Center of Excellence (FACE) are the fragrant aromas of basil, rosemary, dill, mint and other fresh herbs. An assortment of vegetables like carrots, tomatoes and peppers radiate bright hues.

The pleasant sights and smells come from the new community garden at FACE, located right on the school's beautiful campus and designed just for the students.

The Community Garden is Born

The garden came to life thanks to an enthusiastic community volunteer, Brenda Connolly. A self-described "outdoors lover," Brenda, a CPA and mother of two, was looking to reinvigorate her passion for gardening in a way that would benefit her community.

"I wanted to develop my vision of growing locally sourced produce in an educational environment," she said.

Brenda's pursuit led her to FACE, a public charter school managed by Quest that serves children ages 3 to 22 with moderate to severe autism. Since the garden's launch, the approximately 70 students at FACE spend time each week during the school year planting seeds, caring for vegetables and harvesting crops.

Garden Therapy for Autism

A program like the community garden helps FACE students develop essential skills in a fun environment while catering to their unique needs and abilities. For children with autism, who can often struggle with learning, taking a complex skill and breaking it down to a series of smaller, more manageable steps can often be an effective way to teach. This practice can be adapted in the garden setting – a reality that Brenda, who had never worked with children with autism before, learned quickly.

"Something like planting green bean seeds can be a challenging task for some of the kids, because there are four to five steps," she said. "So I had to rethink, 'okay, we're going to do it one step at a time.'"

A multi-step process such as planting seeds is taught in independent stages, from finding the appropriate container all the way to watering. Then, when the students struggled determining how much water to use – a skill that may seem basic – Brenda taught them proper watering by using a cup as a measurement tool. And still, the garden has helped them learn about more than horticulture.

"It's not just about gardening," Brenda said. "We're reaching them in sensory ways, and they're learning other important skills."

(story continued on back)

From the president

This summer marks the milestone 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and it's a good opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments made since the act was introduced. When the law was passed in 1990, it was the first time in American history that people with disabilities were legally protected against discrimination they faced for their disability.

The ADA was a declaration of equality for the disability community, affording people with disabilities the same civil rights as their non-disabled peers and an equal opportunity for employment, transportation, access to facilities and public services, and telecommunications.

Quest was founded nearly 50 years on the same principles of inclusion and equality by a group of parents who refused to accept what was, and instead focused on what could be. From their actions stemmed what we are today: a place where people of all abilities can achieve their goals.

And though our society still has a long way to go, at Quest we're always working toward breaking down the remaining barriers. We continue to search for sustainable ways of securing equal employment, eliminating obstacles to inclusion, creating better understanding, and overall, inspiring and empowering people by offering choices and opportunities.

I hope you will continue to join us in that mission.

Katie

A Birthday Wish Come True

Quest's Tampa group home resident Nicole knew exactly what she wanted for her 38th birthday: a trip to Disney World in Orlando. And not just any trip to the happiest place on earth, but a weekend getaway that included an overnight stay.

For a person without a disability, this request may seem simple, but for someone like Nicole, who was born with Cerebral Palsy and is in a wheelchair, it can be a more difficult task. The challenges of everyday things like recreation, social outings and community events, can be taken for granted by non-disabled individuals.

In Nicole's case, taking the limited staff away from the home, where there are four other residents including three more in wheelchairs, to make sure she was well-cared for while at Disney was an added challenge.

Thankfully, Eric Beal, a program director at Quest, and Nicole's group home staff found a way to make it happen. They decided to make it a group event with all of the housemates – Nicole's friends – and bring along the staff to care for all the residents together on their outing. Planning out the trip in advance and mapping out the wheelchair-friendly accommodations also made the mini-vacation go smoothly.

During their trip, the group home residents spent a fun day at the Magic Kingdom park enjoying the sights and riding the attractions – including Nicole's favorites, "it's a small world" and the 3D movie ride, Mickey's PhilharMagic.

They returned to their hotel and had breakfast at the pool the next morning, ending their day with some shopping before returning back home. All in all, the trip was a success for Nicole, who was able to get the birthday she wanted.

For Eric, the highlight of the weekend was the staff coming together as a team to create a memorable getaway for the group home residents, and especially in making it a special day for Nicole.

"It was rewarding to see her enjoy herself and get that enjoyment out of life," Eric said. "We all need that."



Quest resident Nicole was able to go on a birthday getaway to Disney World, thanks to the planning of Quest staff.

WineQuest Raises More than \$230,000 for Quest

The 14th annual WineQuest event series in June raised more than \$230,000 to benefit Quest! More than 1,000 guests attended the multi-day fundraiser at Grande Lakes Orlando resort – including nearly 700 attendees at the WineQuest Grand Tasting & Auction, making it the largest individual event turnout in WineQuest history.

On behalf of Quest, we would like to thank all of our attendees, corporate sponsors, staff, volunteers, auction donors, and the many others who helped make this year's event another success. With the support of people like you, Quest is able to help people with disabilities in our local community achieve their dreams of going to school, having a job, living on their own and even experiencing summer camp.

Visit <http://www.winequest.org/photos.html> to view photos from this year's celebration.



Major supporter Southern Wine & Spirits of Florida was the exclusive provider of product at WineQuest and additionally donated \$12,500 to Quest.

Thank you again for your support, and we look forward to seeing you at the 15th annual WineQuest in the summer of 2011!

Guest Article: "Why We Support WineQuest"



James Gallagher is a Quest board member and donor. He is actively involved with Quest's largest fundraiser, WineQuest, and is an instrumental part of the event. Below he explains why WineQuest is important to him and to the company he works for, Southern Wine & Spirits of Florida.

My wife Jean first introduced me to Quest when she became a board member several years ago. I then became involved with them myself primarily through WineQuest as I was expediting product needs for **Southern Wine & Spirits of Florida** [a major sponsor of Quest, and the exclusive provider of product at this year's WineQuest].

David Newell, who is the On Premise Sales Director at Southern Wine, always believed in WineQuest, and when he hired me, I assisted with the event. His passion inspired me to get more involved and to take this partnership to the next level. Southern Wine participates in other events in Orlando, but WineQuest is near and dear to us because of our longevity as partners with Quest.

Five years ago, when my wife Jean encouraged me to become a board member at Quest, I realized that this was another way I could give back personally and help our company become even more involved with a great cause for Central Florida.

Southern Wine sees the potential in WineQuest and in how the event is growing, and our suppliers are very gracious with their support which helps us raise the bar every year. It is 14 years running and is becoming one of Orlando's most stand out charitable events. WineQuest is Central Florida's only premier wine tasting of this caliber and we own it! It has momentum and will only get better every year.

But most importantly is what WineQuest does for Quest. Quest has done so well over the past several years, even during these economic times. I don't know how many other nonprofits can hang their hat on that... and WineQuest has helped us to help more people!

It's endearing when you can contribute to an organization and then see it come full circle through your donations, board participation, and involvement with the company you work for. It's what keeps us all going.

Community Garden at FACE Helps Students with Autism Learn

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More than Gardening

The students gain exposure to sensory activities such as digging, exposure to new textures and smells, and exposure to new foods by tasting the vegetables they have harvested, which can be therapeutic for some.

At the same time, they learn social skills by working alongside students from a neighboring charter school, who serve as mentors to the children at FACE. The vegetables produced are later sold at a farmer's market, teaching the students about money management. Funds raised from the market are reinvested back into the garden.

Growing the Garden Further

For Brenda, the upcoming school year will be a chance to do even more with the students and give the garden an opportunity to expand its reach. She hopes to teach the children about composting, introduce a butterfly garden, focus more on crop maintenance, and build partnerships with additional schools. Above all else, she wants each child to be exposed to all the steps in the gardening process, and is constantly thinking of new ways to help them grow.

"I really like working with the kids; they have so much to contribute. And I saw so much progress in them [this past year]. It was unbelievable."



Community volunteer Brenda Connolly works with Nina at the school's new garden at FACE. You can learn more about Quest's FACE school at www.faceprogram.org.

Help Quest Go Green!



You can help Quest become a little bit **greener** by signing up to receive our new electronic version of the Q's News, scheduled to launch in 2011. To join, please visit www.questinc.org/newsletter.aspx.



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