



Francis Tracy Garden Center Celebrates 50 Years

By Lonell Rice

In November 2014, Garden Club of the Upper Keys members and invited guests will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Francis Tracy Garden Center. The FTGC is the hub of Garden Club activities and proclamation by Monroe County recognizing its place in Upper Keys history will be presented.

The history of the Francis Tracy Garden Center started well before its construction did. The Upper Keys Garden Club spun-off from the Key Largo Garden Club in 1954. By 1963, the membership had grown and a larger meeting space was needed. Dr. Fred and Margaret Bond offered property on Overseas Highway to build a clubhouse. The Bonds stipulated that it be named the Francis Tracy Garden Center to honor charter member Francis Tracy for her many contributions to the Garden Club and her conservation leadership.

Building a clubhouse was a major undertaking for the small, nonprofit organization. It held numerous money-raising events to start. An \$8000 mortgage was secured for the balance of the financing. The club's board of directors dug the first shovels of dirt during the ground-breaking ceremony.

The official dedication and public

opening was held in November, 1964. Over 200 members and friends attended. Each club member had been asked to purchase one chair for \$3.75 and 100 were purchased. Over the next three years, the club raised \$8,000 to pay off the mortgage note. In December, 1967, Francis Tracy lit the flame to burn the note for the building named in her honor.

The Upper Keys Garden Club



(now the Garden Club of the Upper Keys) continued to improve and expand the uses of the property. Numerous flower shows, art shows, and design classes have been held there. In 1968, the property was designated a Wild Bird Sanctuary. In 2010, the gardens were declared a Community Peace Park.

The Garden Center looks today pretty much as it did in 1964; there have been no additions or major renovations. A granite cornerstone, salvaged by Rodney Albury from the

1874 wreck of the Mohawk off a reef near Tavernier, was placed in a side wall during construction. This time capsular was opened, reviewed, added to, and resealed in 2007.

The gardens at the Garden Center have evolved through the years under the supervision of dedicated club members. Native trees planted by the charter members now tower over the property. The most recent planting

renovations were started in 2013 with the implementation of an updated master plan.

Maintenance costs have risen as the building has aged. There have been new roofs, painting inside and out, updated electrical system, and flooring, to name a few. The Garden Center has been and is currently used by other

organizations whose donations help offset maintenance costs. The Club also hosts a Garden Walk every year, with a portion of the proceeds used to maintain the Garden Center.

The Garden Club of the Upper Keys is proud to maintain its historical clubhouse and gardens and it should be.

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Garden Walk



UPPER KEYS
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The Garden Club of the Upper Keys will host its 35th annual Garden Walk on Friday, Feb. 28 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. 'Through the Garden Gate' is a self-guided tour of private tropical gardens showcasing some of the most beautiful properties in the Upper Keys. Most of these gardens are open to the public only for this one-day event. For ticket information, visit www.gardenclubupperkeys.org or the Francis Tracy Garden Center located at 94040 Overseas Highway in Tavernier. See story on page 13. Photo by LONELL RICE

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Garden Walk is set for Feb. 28

Outdoor tea party also planned for Francis Tracy Center

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Visitors can stroll among some of the Upper Keys' most beautiful properties while getting ideas for tropical seascapes Friday, Feb. 28, during the popular annual Garden Walk presented by the Garden Club of the Upper Keys.

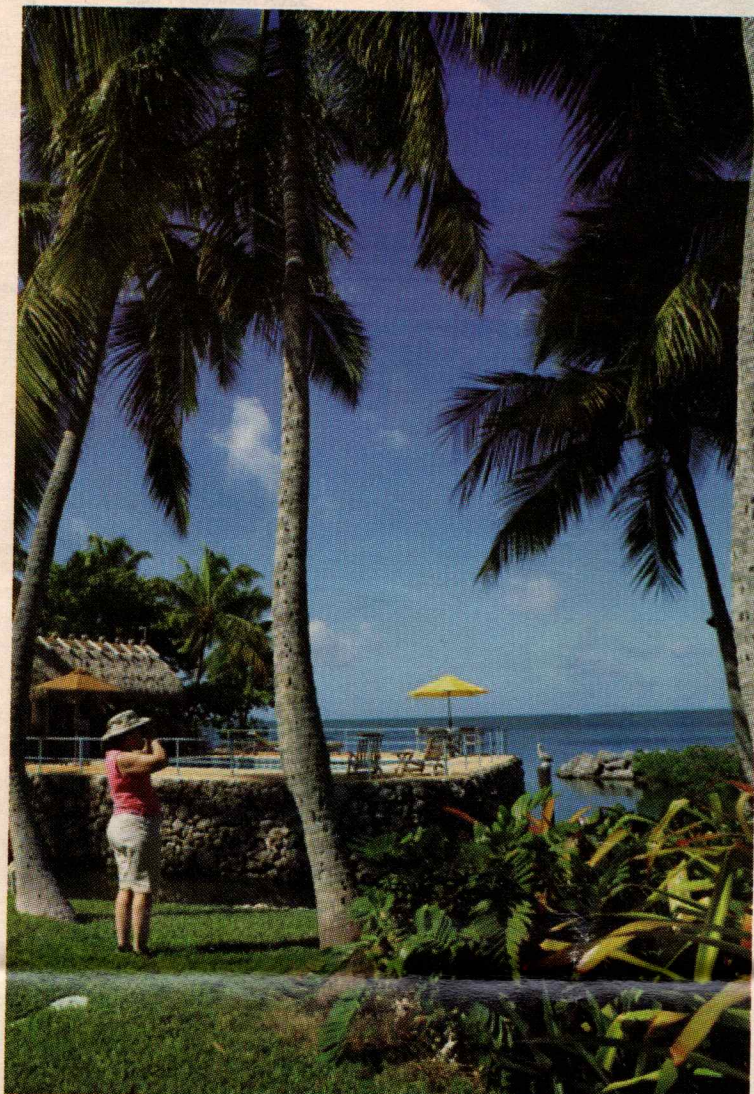
Themed "Through the Garden Gate," the Garden Walk includes lush and unique properties between MM 75 and 95. The tropical plantings include mature, naturalized and exotic palms, some 40 feet tall and 100 years old, and fruit and salt-tolerant native trees. One featured garden employs xeriscaping, a landscaping method developed for water conservation.

The private gardens are to be open for self-guided tours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Most homeowners as well as docents of the garden club, many of them master gardeners, are to be on hand to share plant knowledge.

Driving between featured gardens is required.

Walk participants also are invited to an outdoor garden tea party at the Garden Club's historic Francis Tracy Garden Center, MM 94 in Tavernier, which features local artisans, live music and complimentary refreshments. Other attractions include numerous exhibitor-vendors selling tropical plants, art, honey and natural foodstuffs.

Tickets are a \$25 donation to the Garden Club of the Upper Keys. They can be purchased



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at the Key Largo Chamber of Commerce at MM 106 bayside, Islamorada Chamber of Commerce at MM 87 bayside, Key Largo Florist and Gift Shop at MM 99.5 oceanside and The Banyan Tree tropical garden and boutique at MM 81 oceanside.

On the day of the Garden Walk, attendees can purchase tickets only at the Francis Tracy

Garden Center.

The Garden Club of the Upper Keys is a not-for-profit community organization whose mission is to foster, promote, develop, protect and conserve the natural beauties of the Upper Keys through education and awareness.

BRIEFLY

Expect traffic delays in Upper Keys

There will most likely be traffic delays in the vicinity of Founder's Park in Islamorada (MM 87) due to the Rotary Nautical Flea Market taking place on Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 22-23.

The annual event is expected to cause traffic delays between the hours of 9:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. on both days. These delays will be compounded by the Snake Creek draw bridge, which will continue to open on the hour, each hour to allow boat traffic to pass.

Officers will be assigned to the area to assist with both traffic and pedestrian control.

Softball team to clean beach

The Coral Shores High School softball team is hosting a beach cleanup on Sunday, Feb. 23 from 1 to 4 p.m. at Indian Key Bridge, MM 78. The public is invited to participate as the students earn mandatory community service hours. Wear boots and work clothes, and bring hats, gloves and water.

Art guild hosts show at Key Largo library

The public is invited to the 48th Annual Members Judged Art Show which begins Thursday, Feb. 27 in the Key Largo library community room. Artists of the Art Guild of the Purple Isles will have more than 125 entries on display.

Visitors to the show will have a chance to win an original framed watercolor painting by Tom Jones, nationally

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