

# An idea that has roots



Havana officials visit with Apalachicola officials to learn about a community garden. Town Manager Howard McKinnon holds a key to the city that was presented to the group.

By Bob Bruggner  
Community Columnist

It could be just a coincidence but I've noticed that more and more vegetables are sprouting up around my neighborhood this summer. It started innocently enough with a few bell pepper plants here, an earth-box planted with fresh herbs for salads and seasoning there, here a squash, there a tomato (growing upside-down in a bag) everywhere an eggplant. I wouldn't exactly classify them as Victory Gardens, but with home budgets tightening and the volatility of food pricing now days, the idea of growing your own fresh vegetables is starting to emerge again around the country. In fact, the idea has really started to blossom in some of our neighboring communities.

Last week I had the privilege of accompanying



Town Manager Howard McKinnon, Town Council Member Shirley McGill

and three members of the Havana Garden Club, Margaret Staron, Wendy Adams, and Judy Brundyge on a tour of the Apalachicola Community Garden. Our tour started at The Grill Restaurant over lunch with local garden organizers Karla Ambos, Jenny Billings, Beverly Hewitt and city administrator Betty Taylor-Webb. The idea of creating a community garden arose just over a year ago out of discussions around beautifying the city, the local Food Pantry's need for fresh vegetables, and the desire

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to find a vehicle to help strengthen the bond between all segments of the Apalachicola community.

Following lunch it was off to the community garden where Apalachicola Mayor Van Johnson, who presented our group with a key to the city, was there to greet us. Mayor Johnson had obviously done his homework as he related that "Havana was not the *only* friendly city in North Florida" as he smiled and passed over the key.

Working with four vacant city lots provided by the city, the community garden group volunteers worked alongside inmates from the Franklin County work camp, to build 29 raised garden beds and two large tilled plots, one each for the Food Pantry and local Charter School. Topsoil was trucked in from the county landfill; the city ran a waterline to the site and water spigots were placed at each individual bed as they were completed. By the time the garden was finished in March, the city had received so many requests

(over 60) from potential gardeners that they wound up sharing the 29 beds among 54 gardeners. Over 100 people attended the "Blessing of the Garden" by local clergy on Earth Day and the garden has become a popular stop on the annual Apalachicola Tour of Homes. Mayor Johnson was quick to point out that the city's investment in the community garden is paying big dividends. Not only has it served as a vehicle for providing sustenance to needy families in Apalachicola, it has also created opportunities for social gatherings, beautification, education and recreation throughout the entire community.

Would the Town of Havana support a community garden? We'd like to hear your thoughts. Personally, after the lunch I had at The Grill last week, I'm especially interested in planting some of those shrimp and oyster bushes next spring. Your comments, ideas and suggestions are always welcome. (bbruggner@gmail.com)