

# Fairoaks Independent Living Center

Everyone deserves beauty in their life. Like seeing flowers in bloom from your front porch or watching the seasons passing as trees bud in early spring or leaves change color in the fall. This is what Barbara Burgin (Class of 2007) believed. So, when she first saw the grounds at Fairoaks Independent Living Center she was sad to see the landscape covered only with 3 to 4 feet tall weeds. No beauty at all.

Barbara took action. First as an individual and then as a Denton County Master Gardener intern project manager, she committed to give Fairoaks residents beauty not often seen in Section 8 HUD housing.



At first the Extension Agent who approved new projects was skeptical. After all it was almost 3½ acres and there was little money available to support a new large scale effort. But Barbara persisted and the project began.

During her five years as project manager, she welcomed the support of many master gardeners and interns who donated hundreds of plants and thousands of volunteer hours until each of the 40 residential units and common areas were enhanced with flowers, shrubs and trees.

Today, each resident has their own piece of nature's beauty and the project supports over 50 large and small garden areas. In 2012, Barbara turned over the project management to Dale Powell (Class of 2011). Dale began working at Fairoaks as an intern volunteer. Dale like many of the volunteers — both interns and master gardeners — wanted to improve the resident's quality of life because of personal experience with the effects of Alzheimer's on older individuals and their families.



Dale sees the DCMGA mission at Fair Oaks Independent Living Center as two-fold. One is the landscape care and beautification. The other is providing a learning laboratory for master gardener interns — 12 to 15 interns work at Fair Oaks each week.



The year kicks off with a rose pruning class taught by Karen Peden of the Denton Garden Club — a project partner, which donates plants and participates in the season finale task, the Six Pack Potting Party when volunteers put fall and winter annuals in porch pots.

Work begins in early February with cleaning up beds and adding mulch. Plants are added to the grounds around residences and in common areas. Master gardeners donate plants and some are purchased. Last year, Dale won a \$500 grant from Miracle-Gro, which was used to purchase plants — with over 3 acres there is plenty of room for new plants.

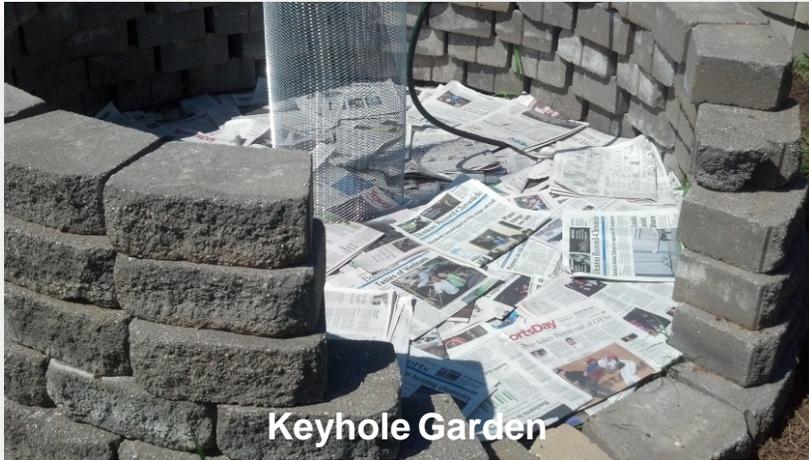
As spring turns into summer, volunteers weed, prune and water the landscape beds. Last year, Dale worked with the resident manager and resident's town hall to bring the DCMGA Children's Garden to Fair Oaks. In addition to offering experiential-based training, this raised bed shares some vegetables and herbs with residents.



Dale's vision is to add one — usually multiple — new project(s) each year in addition to routine maintenance. So far this year, the team completed a major stone project, added two drip irrigation projects, built a picnic bench, and started one new garden.

A new educational and utilitarian project this year is the creation of a keyhole garden. This type of gardening originated in arid areas of Africa. It is a circular garden several feet across, with a notch or "keyhole" built in to one side for access.

Walls of the keyhole garden are 1 to 3-feet tall. At the center is a wire cage for adding composting materials and water. A slight slope allows the nutritionally-enhanced water to flow outward to feed the plants. Volunteers constructed the sides using landscape stones and then applied a lasagna-type gardening technique that uses layers of material beginning with



newspaper, then small sticks, followed by soil and mulch. The keyhole garden will be ready for vegetable planting this fall.

As project manager, Dale is committed to making volunteer's experience at Fair Oaks rewarding and fun. "I try to get the volunteers to participate in selecting, designing and planning the projects as well as doing the work. I've found that they

generally know a lot and just need to be encouraged to be confident with their knowledge. We have lots of discussions about the projects and the plants. I learn from them all the time."

Committed volunteers and DCMGA support improved the quality of life for the almost 40 Fair Oaks residents. And, the experience of working at Fair Oaks enriches the lives of the volunteers who help make that difference. It is a win-win.