

## **Friends of the Martinez Post Office—A Master Gardener Project Since 2009**

### **How It All Began**

In January of 2009, our Richmond & Columbia County Master Gardener class was hearing about trees. I asked Sid Mullis, the Richmond County Extension Agent, if he had noticed the *bizarre* shape of the Bradford Pear trees at the Martinez Post Office.

Sid pointed at me and said, "Suzanne, that is your project!"

I took a deep breath and agreed to check on the trees. That afternoon, facing the manager of the Post Office, I suggested he cut down those trees since they were breaking and dying anyway. He refused. They were the only shade on the whole property. Inspired, I asked if we could plant replacement trees. He indicated he was not sure about it.

I went home and began to research trees. Trees have great value in urban settings. Where "development" has occurred trees have been sacrificed in many cases to the detriment of the ecosystems that depend upon their functions. Trees offer shade, beauty, and carbon sequestration. They also provide habitat for birds, insects, and animals. Their flowers attract bees. Their leaves provide natural mulch that eventually converts to soil. In short, trees are essential to the well-being of our own ecosystem.

A scientific article about carbon sequestration properties of various trees grown in the southern United States helped to convince the manager of the Post Office that new trees would be useful.

Armed with permission to plant replacement trees, I went back to our class and appealed to the gardeners for assistance. This would be a large project. At the time, I did not realize how big a project and how long a project it would be. Four people agreed to help and we became the Friends of the Martinez Post Office.

### ***The Friends are all Georgia Master Gardeners:***

***Suzanne Thomas, Coordinator***

***Floride Dickert***

***David Thomas***

***Marilyn Donnan***

***Jessye Corona***

The first year, we planted bare root trees that apparently were non-viable when they arrived. They were given to us by the Forrestry Service wrapped in paper and had been out of water and soil for 3-4 days. Eventually, we realized they were simply not going to leaf out and pulled them out.

### **The Islands Needed Help**

While we were waiting to see what they would do, we noticed that the two parking lot islands needed help. There were weeds and trash and leaves from the previous fall. We began cleaning up the two islands and decided to plant some things to brighten up the two spots. Over the two years, we have planted perennials including daffodils, day lilies, lantana, canna lilies, lirioppe, forsythia, iris, and butterfly weeds. In season, we have planted annual flowers to brighten up the islands for the beauty of the area. This past winter we planted pansies to create color spots. Recently we planted petunias and marigolds.

### **Help From a Friend**

In the Fall of 2009, Bobby Temenek, who owns Stallion Tree Service, agreed to trim back the Bradford Pear trees to prevent any further breakage. Two trees had died within the previous month from breaking during storms. He brought his crew to the Post Office and trimmed back the numerous Bradford Pears and saved them from further damage. The following spring, those trees bloomed out and began a new life! They have now fully recovered a round shape. They will need another trim in the Fall of 2011. Hopefully, our tree champion will return to trim them.

### **A Second Planting of Trees**

In the winter of 2009, we ordered bare root trees from commercial nurseries here in the South. They came packed in plastic with glycerine-like balls that kept them from drying out until we could plant them. We planted 8 ginkos, 3 tulip poplars, 3 southern red oaks, 3 red maples, and 2 sweet bay magnolias. We also planted shrubs along the front of the Post Office building: 2 tea olives, 4 nandinas, 3 Nellie Stephens hollies.

### **The US Postal System and Funding Woes**

Because the Post Office has little money for upkeep of their grounds, we have volunteered our time and efforts freely. Because their watering system is broken, we have had to carry water to maintain the things we planted. In the Summer of 2010, we watered three days a week. We carried 2 gallons of water to each tree and shrub plus watering the plants on the islands. We went to the Post Office at 6:30-7:00 a.m. each day we watered. We scheduled our time through the summer and covered for one another during vacations and work trips.

### **The Heat Was Brutal.**

We knew we had to water those plants or they would die. But we suffered from the heat and the work of carrying the water. We provided much of the water from home because it was easier to load the filled water bottles at home for the first round of watering. Then we filled up our bottles at the Post Office faucet to complete the necessary watering. My brother in law gave me a little red wagon that carries ten, one-gallon milk jugs. It used to carry his grandchildren; now it carries water jugs. Finally the summer ended and we began to wean the trees from their regular watering schedule. We had enough rain this winter to carry them through.

### **GMGA Funding**

In July 2010, we submitted a proposal to the Georgia Master Gardener Association and were granted \$140 to buy gardening products. That money has been spent on fire ant insecticide, 2 flats of flowers from the CSRA Humane Society's fundraiser, photographs for reports, and a bag of garden soil for planting the flowers on the islands. We have about \$35 left for this summer's flowers and soil supplements. All other supplies and equipment, and of course all the labor, are provided by members of our group.

### **Educational Mission**

Since March of 2010, Suzanne has written a monthly column for the Montclair Association Newsletter entitled Gardening in Montclair.

In January of 2011, Suzanne made a presentation to a gardening group organized by Judy Kirkland. There were approximately 30 people in attendance, all gardeners, all who were interested in trees and their culture. The presentation was well accepted.

In April of 2011, Suzanne made a presentation to a group of 15 professional women about gardening, providing copies of three months' articles from 2010.

### **Success!**

This Spring 2011, every one of the trees has set out leaves. That is our measure of success – 100%! They all survived the hottest summer and the coldest winter on record!

### **Public Response**

Each day we work at the Post Office, people stop us and ask who we are and what we are doing. We explain that we are a group of Master Gardeners and that the Post Office is our community service project. Without exception, they thank us and let us know how much better it is looking. They joke with us about coming to their house next. Post Office staff now receive compliments about the grounds instead of complaints.

### **Looking Ahead**

What we need most urgently is to get help to repair the watering system at the Post Office. There are broken sprinkler heads and some broken underground pipes. When turned on, the water from the sprinkler system is misdirected, some of it going into the paved areas instead of the planted area, some of it running uncapped onto the pavement, and some actually going where it is needed.

- Repairing the sprinkler system would mean that we could count on the watering system this summer instead of having to carry water to each tree and shrub.
- Repairing the sprinkler system would mean that our legacy of trees for this urban environment would exist beyond our time for those who will follow.