

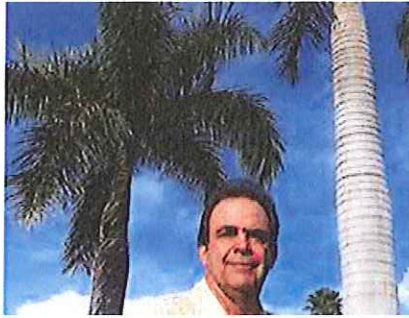
Saving the trees and preserving landscape

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The trees -- all 150 of them, including cluster palms, crepe myrtles, and 30- to 50-foot royal and date palms that weigh several tons apiece -- sit together in a block in the southwest corner of Darrell Turner's Ellenton farm. Large oaks on the property's edge protect these visitors from what Turner calls "the wicked wind from the north."



STAFF PHOTO / HAROLD BUBIL

Nurseryman Darrell Turner at Turner Tree and Landscape in Manatee County. Photo taken 1-25-2012 by Harold Bubil.

The trees have been at the farm since they were transported by tractor-trailer, three per truck, five years ago from the former site of the Sarasota Quay, on U.S. 41 at Fruitville Road. The plan was that Turner would care for the trees, as he had those at the neighboring Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota, until a \$1 billion retail-residential project was complete. Then the trees would be returned to the site and replanted.

That project has since become a casualty of the Great Recession, but the trees are thriving. "They just keep getting bigger, better and nicer," said Turner, who is president of Turner Tree and Landscape. "Basically they're on life support."

Three times a day the trees are watered. They're given liquid fertilizer once a month and are "hand-fed" -- Turner's term -- granular fertilizer every three months.

The trees will remain at the farm until the fate of the Quay site is determined. In the meantime, Turner said he's happy to be looking after them, as he did the Ritz-Carlton trees for two years, and as he does for hundreds of other trees that remain on-site as developers work around them.

"We're saving them, not going in with an excavator to pull them out. It feels good to be doing the right thing," said Turner.

He is not alone in his habitat-preserving approach. Conventional thinking pits development against the environment, with developers maneuvering around regulations and ordinances to maximize profits. But many developers, builders and landscapers, of their own volition, are taking measures to preserve and protect the habitat. Environmentally responsible practices make sense, they say, both ethically and financially.

"From a moral perspective, there's an increasing awareness that we ought to have a better standard of practice when we are quote-unquote improving the land," said

builder Josh Wynne of Josh Wynne Construction. "The other perspective is that of efficiency as it relates to the cost of development. Green practice doesn't necessarily cost more money. Often times it actually adds value."

Consider, for example, a 5-acre parcel, or planned unit development (PUD), that conventionally would be approved for 10 homes. Such a PUD in Florida typically includes a retention pond to contain stormwater runoff, with algaecide applications necessary to deal with the effects of accumulated fertilizer. "That's the old method," and by no means an optimal solution, according to Wynne, who has built the highest-scoring LEED-Platinum new home in the United States.

"What you get is essentially a cesspool," said Wynne of the end result of retention ponds. Instead, green-conscious developers are using bio-swales -- vegetated troughs that naturally filter the runoff. "You wind up with better treatment of the storm water and more buildable lots," said Wynne.

Another way to decrease runoff is through the use of permeable paving materials. Permeable, or pervious, pavers include unit (e.g. block or plastic grid) and poured (typically concrete) paving systems that allow stormwater to filter down through into storage basins, according to the University of Florida's Field Guide to Low Impact Development (FGLID).

Although the installation and maintenance of permeable pavement tends to require more labor and time than conventional concrete or asphalt, FGLID holds that such a system can be cost-competitive "when it reduces the size of, or eliminates the need for, curb and gutter conveyance systems and large stormwater retention ponds."

Brad Gaubatz, vice-president of community development for CAP Management, knows all about permeable pavement, bio-swales and more. CAP's Lidia Farm proposal, which awaits funding following approval by the investors who own the Palmetto site, calls for 60 solar-powered "net zero," or zero-energy-costs, townhouses on 20 acres designed without fill or retention ponds. Instead of having conventional lawns, common areas will be xeriscaped through the use of native and drought-tolerant plants that require minimal irrigation.

"Traditional horizontal development is way too expensive. It's inefficient, and it's not sustainable," Gaubatz said. "We proposed a development that's about as progressive as you can get. It's cheaper, more efficient and sustainable."

At the same time, Lidia Farm is, by Gaubatz' own admission, "not for everybody." Indeed, the interior of the community will be car-free; homeowners will park in a car barn on the side of the development and access their homes by Segway, golf cart, bicycle, or on foot via a network of pedestrian paths. In many cases, habitat-protective measures are more conventional, though perhaps no less profound.

At Lakewood Ranch, designated the largest green-certified, master-planned community in the nation, 150 miles of trails wind through 3,500 acres set aside as conservation land, lakes and parks.

The trails are routed to preserve the integrity of the natural surroundings, such as a lake, where white herons fish, that is circumscribed by a path set back from the water's wooded edge.

In Lakewood Ranch's residential neighborhoods, every house built since 2005 meets the Florida Green Building Coalition's Green Home Standard, and all water used for irrigation is reclaimed and recycled. The Lakewood Ranch Golf & Country Club is a member of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

"Bob Simons is the greenest, most conscientious developer I've ever worked with," said landscaper Turner of the vice-president of development for Lakewood Ranch's parent company, Schroeder-Manatee Ranch, Inc. "He tries to work around every tree that's there."

For himself, Turner also is going to keep trying to save trees. He said he was "tickled" by his involvement with the Ritz-Carlton preservation project, which cost \$250,000 rather than the \$400,000 it would have to buy all new trees.

"It was less expensive, and it was the right thing to do," said Turner. "At the end of the day, we preserved a ton of history, and those trees all went back to the place where they'd been for 100 years."

This story appeared in print on page old trees by transplanting them during construction.
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