



*The Florida Association of Homes and Services for the Aging  
Innovation Exchange*

*Submission*

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<i>Title of Innovation:</i>	<b>Landscape Therapy</b>
<i>Topic for Submission:</i>	<b>Topic: Quality of Life</b>
<i>Audience:</i>	<b>HUD Housing Communities X Retirement Communities (CCRC or fee for Service) Assisted Living Facilities Nursing Homes</b>

**1. DESCRIPTION OF INNOVATION:**

“Plants are a metaphor for Life”: This will focus on our recent efforts to develop **a)** our own plant propagation program in order to supply our vast needs for a variety of landscaping materials. Almost any community can find a little space in which to propagate from cuttings or seedlings significant numbers and varieties of plants and trees to be used in the ongoing beautification of the property. We have outsourced our less-technical and more labor-intensive landscaping chores such as grass-cutting and mulching. Our relatively small Grounds Team now focuses more on plant selection, propagation, and rotation. We have saved many dollars in plant costs and we have developed a more knowledgeable and customer service-oriented Grounds crew. But the most important benefit of this program is that constant presence of new and vigorous plant life all around our community as a beautiful inspiration and a reminder of regeneration and new life.

Another parallel project is **b)** our resident-funded and resident-run Orchid House, a greenhouse devoted entirely to the art of growing hundreds of varieties of orchids. This is not only a life-giving hobby for numerous residents, but the whole community is blessed by the donation of many of these orchids for special events.

One of our best operational decisions in our grounds management has been the outsourcing of less technically challenging aspects of landscaping maintenance, while training and mentoring our staff to incorporate sound horticultural practices specific to Southwest Florida.

In 2004, our nursery was begun as a holding area for plants delivered by vendors for projects. This allowed us to order additional plants and realize a savings on the plant costs. This provided extra plant material available for small landscaping projects that popped up. The nursery then became an area in which we would store plants that had been removed or replaced. This step expanded the role of the nursery from simply a location for plants to be stored to a place to where we nurtured them back to health.

We selected the location for our nursery based on several criteria. Its location is close to our regular work area, has areas of sun and shade, and we have access to water for irrigation. When we started, we stored less than 50 plants in our nursery. Our nursery today is the home for hundreds of plants and 35 different plant species.

Our next step in the evolution of the nursery was to begin the propagation of plant materials. Since then, we have established a small potting bench and we have successfully created up to 60 plants from a single plant stock. This has given us far greater flexibility in the replacement of poorly growing plants in areas of high visibility. Referring back to our belief that “plants are a metaphor for life”, we have felt and heard of the appreciation and delight of residents who are encouraged by the constant replenishment and rotation of flowering and ornamental plants in areas of high traffic.

The nursery stock has also been useful for training our staff. We have monthly plant identification quizzes and the nursery is quite helpful for this training method. It also allows for experimentation and trial and error in a “laboratory” that is cost-efficient and less visible.

At Shell Point, the residents are veterans of plant propagation. Our Orchid House is a resident volunteer enterprise that was established in 1986. A greenhouse of approximately 1,000 square feet was built at a cost of \$23,686, completely by funds donated by the residents. The Orchid House is run entirely by residents and currently we have eight who participate in the care and growing of the orchids.

There are thousands of varieties of orchids. Our greenhouse has several hundred of these varieties in addition to ten hybrid species that have been developed specifically to withstand the tropical climate of Florida. These beautiful flowering plants are frequently featured as centerpieces for a variety of shows and events at Shell Point and the surrounding community.

At Shell Point, we are fortunate to have a growing number of residents and staff members who participate actively in the life-giving activity of plant propagation. A little bit of space, a little bit of money, and a few people with green thumbs are all it takes to begin this kind of project and to enhance the beauty of a community.

**2. BUDGET:**

We have spent less than \$1,000 on the nursery at this point in its existence. The average cost of a new 3-gallon plant is \$10. We have likely saved 500 to 600 plants that we would have thrown out if we did not have a means/place to pot and store. We estimate our savings, thus far, to be approximately \$4,000 to \$5,000.

The cost of the Orchid House is stated above. The labor is all volunteer, with a little help from our Grounds Team.