



## Garden at St. Augustine Health Ministries in Cleveland brings happiness to residents: Full House

Published: Thursday, August 30, 2012, 8:00 AM Updated: Thursday, August 30, 2012, 8:03 AM



**Julie Washington, The Plain Dealer**  
By

The world doesn't need more asphalt. It needs more black-eyed Susans, spreading pine trees and trickling waterfalls.

St. Augustine Health Ministries, a long-term-care facility on Cleveland's West Side, came to this brilliant conclusion a few years ago and started raising money to turn a corner of its parking lot into a green oasis.

The money was raised, the pond was dug, and now that the garden has had a few years to flourish, marketing director Dana Carns invited me to see St. Augustine's Life Enriching Gardens and learn about how this project has affected lives there.



[View full size](#)

Dana Carns

Residents and staff of St. Augustine Health Ministries in Cleveland enjoy a garden that the long-term-care facility built with donations. It gives residents access to green space in the midst of the city.

"We're in the city surrounded by cement," Carns said. She and other administrators felt it was important for patients to have green space, a retreat where they wouldn't need to be supervised.

The garden has filled that need and more. Staffers take their breaks in the garden. Visiting families hang out there; kids love to ride on the wheelchair-friendly glider with grandparents or have squirt-gun fights.

Rain was threatening on the morning of my visit, but it held off long enough for Carns to stroll through the garden with me. A wide, concrete path wound between hostas and ornamental trees. A meditation area surrounds a statue of the Virgin Mary, which was donated along with benches and brick pavers. A waterfall and pond teeming with koi added the gurgle of running water.

It's also the place where music therapy classes meet in nice weather. "It stimulates their senses," she said.

Oreo, the center's resident cat, considers the green space her domain. Residents make a game of searching for Oreo, whether she's peeking out from a leafy hiding place or stretched wide on a bench.

Soon the rain came, and we retreated inside. Carns told me how the center spent five years raising nearly \$300,000 for the garden and worked with a professional contractor and landscaper to build it. The center's maintenance staff keeps up the garden, which is closed to the general public.

St. Augustine is a faith-based and not-for-profit health care facility offering skilled nursing, assisted-living, long-term and hospice care. Many of its 250 residents suffer from brain injuries, multiple sclerosis or other illnesses that leave them with limited physical functions.

"We try to bring life to them as much as we can," Carns said.

"Full of life" certainly describes resident Marian Klepak, a smiling, upbeat woman who would only admit to being in her 70s. Her grandmother passed along a love of gardening to Klepak; the move to St. Augustine hasn't stopped her from puttering outdoors.

"It's fun. All the people enjoy it," Klepak said. "I love those lilies [in the pond], they're beautiful."

Carns and I dropped in to the arts-and-crafts room, where creative-arts specialist Kristine Webber described the garden-related projects she uses to connect residents to the garden -- picking pine cones for art projects, fashioning frogs and snakes out of clay, and painting pet rocks. Recently, she helped residents make plant markers to help identify the garden's botanicals.

"We get to go out on our back porch at home. Now they have a place to go," Webber said. "They love it, and it's very calming."

As I left St. Augustine, I took one more walk through the garden to savor its peacefulness. Klepak had told me how the ever-changing kaleidoscope of flowers, birds and the cat enticed her and other residents outdoors.

And I smiled recalling her suggestion that other nursing facilities put in gardens for their residents. "They'd be happier," she said.

© 2012 cleveland.com. All rights reserved.