

Volunteers spend the day in Immokalee planting fruit trees

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(Photo: Liz Freeman/Naples Daily News)

Nearly two dozen people who normally spend their days in offices traded computer screens for shovels Tuesday.

Bankers, lawyers, office workers and veterans worked side by side for the day as volunteers planting fruit trees at the Florida State University Immokalee Health Education site in Immokalee.

The aim is to help transform the grounds of the medical complex so people can get healthier when they are outside, similar to the mission when they are inside getting medical attention.

The extension office has many species of fruit trees available to plant with the muscle of the volunteers from Goldman Sachs, the Quarles & Brady law firm and veterans from the Wounded Warrior Project.

“The goal is to have something fruiting every month,” said Mary Jane Cary, a master gardener with the Collier County UF/IFAS Extension Office.

Goldman Sachs is a longtime partner and supporter of the Naples Children & Education Foundation. Volunteers with the investment firm can elect to spend a day each year on a project that benefits one of the charities served by NCEF.

NCEF sponsors the Naples Winter Wine Festival, and since its inception in 2001, the festival has raised more than \$161 million.

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Two dozen volunteers with Goldman Sachs, the Quarles & Brady law firm, and the Wounded Warrior Project joined forces Tuesday, April 25, 2017, in a project to plant fruit trees on the campus of the Florida State University's Immokalee Health Education Site. Goldman Sachs is a longtime supporter of the Naples Children & Education Foundation and does a volunteer project once a year with a charity that is served by NCEF. (Photo: Liz Freeman/Naples Daily News)

The NCEF trustees have awarded grants to more than 45 nonprofit organizations and undertaken long-term initiatives that have benefited more than 200,000 children.

Alicia Brady, 27, an Army veteran who served in Afghanistan and today lives in Cape Coral, is busy serving in the Army Reserves and taking classes at Keiser University. She doesn't have much time for gardening.

“Working with a master gardener, maybe I will learn something,” Brady said.

The volunteers got a detailed briefing about each step involved, including how they would be burying irrigation lines and how the fruit trees needed to be planted in raised beds.

The long-range goal is to make the FSU complex a healthy campus with a variety of amenities, from a walkway around the complex to pavilions for outdoor exercise classes, Dr. Javier Rosado, director of clinical training for FSU at Immokalee, said.

Families in Immokalee have limited opportunities to do family-fun things together, and the goal is to change that with a community garden and the fruit trees to promote healthier food choices and to be educational.

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So far, about \$5,000 has been spent on the project, which includes a raised garden that was put in last month, said Suzanne Fundingsland, an educator with the University of Florida IFAS Extension office in Immokalee.

"This is priceless, the labor," she said, referring to Tuesday's volunteers.

When the walking path gets added, the plan is for it be appealing to runners, cyclists and wheelchair users.

Barry Schneirov, a vice president with Goldman Sachs in Miami, said it's great to see the impact that NCEF has on changing children's lives.

"I love the day each spring when my colleagues and I partner with our friends at Quarles & Brady and the Wounded Warriors to pitch in and help one of NCEF's beneficiary organizations," Schneirov said.

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Alicia Brady, 27, of Cape Coral, and Nathan Rimpf, 29, of West Palm Beach, volunteer in Immokalee on Tuesday to plant fruit trees at Florida State University's Immokalee Health Center. Both are with the Wounded Warrior Project, one of three groups that volunteered on a Community TeamWorks Initiative, a program of Goldman Sachs, which is a partner with the Naples Children & Education Foundation. Goldman Sachs does a volunteer project once a year with an NCEF-funded charity. (Photo: Liz Freeman/Naples Daily News)

Robert Bulloch, managing partner with Quarles & Brady, said the law firm is focused on community involvement that is educational, health-oriented and impactful.

Once all the healthy campus elements are added to the FSU site, it will be a first-class place for kids to enjoy.

"It beats obesity," he said.

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