



Fleur de Lis

THE JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR LOUISIANA IRISES

WINTER 2015

NUMBER 242

'Fringed Gold View' at Plantation Point, Mooringsport, LA

Photo by Ron Killingsworth

Preserving our Coastal Waters/Lives

A Small Glimpse of our Natural Beauty

~Story & Photos submitted by Katharine Ohman

Occasionally, like so many Mississippi Gulf Coast residents, my thoughts go back to Hurricane Katrina's wrath ten years ago when most of our coastal communities were devastated. It still is hard to fathom that our once green and lush landscape had so quickly turned brown and seemingly devoid of life. Most homes and businesses that were not completely destroyed were transformed beyond recognition. Our lives were changed forever but even in the midst of that nightmare glimpses of hope could be found. Initially, survival was the main focus for the majority of us. However as time passed our personal needs as well as those of the community were altered. Gradually for the lucky ones, overwhelming situations became less stressful and periods of rest and opportunity for growth began to appear.



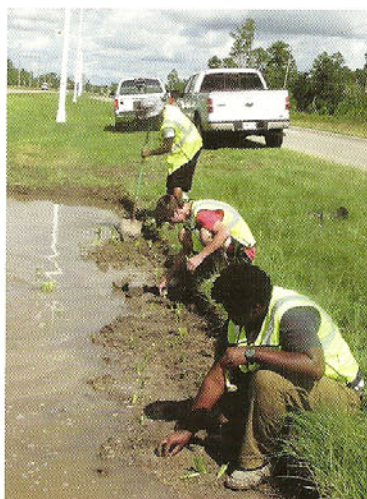
BSL Public Works Division begins another conservational landscaping bed on Hwy 603.

Today, as one exits I-10 to travel south on the green corridor of four-laned Hwy 603 toward Bay St. Louis and Waveland it's easy to focus on the natural beauty of the resurgent landscape. Miles of saltwater marshes offer wide vistas on either side of the roadway extending to several small islands of tall pines nestled alongside cattail dominated waterways. There are opportunities to see young whitetail deer or even baby wild hogs (cute at a distance!) roaming the high grass embankments of their wetland habitat. Approaching the low arched bridge over Bayou Lacroix, the contrast of the water against the marsh and the sky can be breathtaking. Crossing the bridge in bright sunlight (or moonlight) the bayou's surface can explode with an overwhelming multitude of sparkles like a silent fireworks



Harold Zeugin, BSL Beautification Division, installs 'Conservational Landscaping' signs.

display. Raise your focus to the sky and perhaps catch a flock of sea gulls scouting a school of juvenile fish or just a single Great Blue Heron wading in the pools beside the road, hopeful to spear his next meal. Continue driving south toward the two cities as the marshland areas give way to higher elevations, easily seen by the changes in wetland vegetation along with increased evidence of coastal development. This naturally relaxing drive toward Bay St. Louis and Waveland from I-10 has provided plenty of opportunities for residents and visitors alike to appreciate the resiliency and diversity our coastal



Volunteers "getting' down 'n dirty."

environment following THE storm. While some of the native flora has recovered nicely, our native Louisiana Iris population continues to struggle to its previous place in this landscape. A few years after Katrina, the City of Bay Saint Louis introduced conservational landscaping beds in several locations along Hwy 90, a highly trafficked area located closer to downtown BSL. This initial Conservational

Landscaping area was introduced/created to protect and improve water quality by the reduction of non-point source pollution (e.g., road and soil contaminants such as oil, chemicals, fertilizers, animal waste, etc.) caused



Waveland volunteers enjoying themselves by creating their own natural planting designs within the beds. In this approach, these individuals took further ownership in their work and later discussed how they would share the experience with their families and others.

by unavoidable runoff. Irises donated by local residents were planted in specifically 'marked' landscaping beds enabling these unique and versatile plants the opportunity to absorb water pollution prior to it entering into our precious environment. Continued community interest and support enabled the Bay to complete three additional water gardens over the next few years. The adoption of the Louisiana Iris as the city's formal flower soon fell into place as well. This on-



Katharine Ohman (orange vest) discusses these specialized plants in more detail with interested volunteers on site.

going community interest and support in preserving our coastal waters led to other specialized plantings such as Elephant Ears, Cattails, Swamp Lilies, etc. in unincorporated areas of the county. Locally, the acceptance of alternative plantings in the reduction or elimination of water pollution was now being

considered a more viable green weapon of choice.

Hancock County communities are intertwined with extensive waterways but only one north-south high traffic roadway system that cuts through an area of natural beauty described above, Hwy 603. Along this corridor, the city of BSL and with the assistance of its sister city of Waveland recently were given a special opportunity to create seven large Conservational Landscaping beds each measuring approximately 15 feet by 36 feet and positioned in the median north and south of Bayou LaCroix. This beautiful and natural fertile area was ideal for the proposed environmental project. The immediate focus was on the reduction and/or elimination of water pollution from Hwy 603 through the re-introduction of Louisiana Irises. Two companies, Louisiana Iris Gardens, Tully, NY and Bois d'Arc Gardens, Schriever, LA, responded to an outreach and donated thousands of extraordinarily beautiful Louisiana Irises to this 'green' project. Owners



Planting volunteer, Adriana Metcalfe enjoys her Iris fiesta!

of both companies wholeheartedly invested in our local community, donating their time, energy, and resources toward improving our quality of life on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Their kindness and generosity have contributed enormously to the quality of life for our citizens as well a local wildlife.

The Cities of Waveland, Diamondhead, the Clermont Harbor community and other communities have followed suit and begun to introduce and/or protect specialized plantings in areas of concern

as dictated by the needs of each. Our county's municipalities have and continue to envision a greener community and in the a healthier one by supporting the preservation and protection of our precious resources. Through good practice projects such as the Hwy 603 plantings, increased interest can be expected. For generations to come passersby will be blessed by the array of colors produced by the Louisiana Irises and hopefully reminded of two companies with giving hearts.



Katharine Ohman is a fierce advocate for "re-greening" Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi. She has been recognized with many awards, but her passion is building relationships with young offenders using her skills as both gardener and therapist.