

FLAMINGO GARDENS CELEBRATES SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEKEND WILL CELEBRATE THE ONSET OF THE CITRUS INDUSTRY IN BROWARD COUNTY. ONCE A CITRUS GROVE, BOTANICAL ATTRACTION MARKS ITS 76TH YEAR

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

The planting of a single orange tree 76 years ago may not seem like an event to be celebrated in south Florida.

But the planting of the first tree in what today is known as Flamingo Gardens is being celebrated in a big way on Saturday February 22 with half-price admission to the popular garden attraction, tours of the historic Wray home located on the property and an exhibition of the most popular car from those early years—the Ford Model A.

“That first tree was the start of the first packing house for Flamingo Groves and the start of the fresh fruit business,” said Stan Wood, the Executive Director of Flamingo Gardens and a distant cousin of the founders, Floyd and Jane Wray.

The Wrays bought the farm in Davie in 1927, and planted a 40-acre grove of Lue Gim Gong summer maturing oranges starting on February 22 of that year. Eventually, the groves grew to 2,000 acres covering three square miles of land that was ideal for orange crops.

The next year, Floyd Wray began the development of a botanical collection and an experimental station. Seventy varieties of citrus trees were planted in a 12-acre botanical garden containing rare tropical fruit trees and shrubs.

Wray went on to develop packing houses and shipping centers and to be instrumental in the development of what is today Port Everglades.

In the early 1930s, the Wrays began construction of a home on the property that today is open as an historic exhibit for those who visit the gardens.

A hurricane in 1947 destroyed 70 percent of the groves, and the property began to move more toward a garden and visitors center. A Bird of Prey center was opened in 1990 to house injured birds and in 1991, a Free Flight Aviary opened which today houses over 300 birds from over 45 species.

Stan Wood says that the aviary is the largest such facility in the country.

Wood should know. He spent much of his life living on the property and knows it from front to back. “The botanical garden today has 65 acres including a working orange grove, a tram ride, wildlife encounter shows, an educational program and 26 special events a year,” he said.

Planning those events is the responsibility of Elizabeth Kostecki, the Director of Volunteer Services and Special Events for Flamingo Gardens.

“There is a different event at Flamingo Gardens almost every other weekend,” Kostecki said. “We have reptile and plant shows and other special exhibits.”

Kostecki is especially excited about the Model A show during the garden’s upcoming anniversary. “Those cars were popular during the early days of Flamingo Groves, so it’s nice to have those vintage cars here.”

Nearly 20 of the vintage cars will be exhibited according to Bert Armada of Southwest Ranches who is the president of the Model A Restorers Club, Gold Coast Region. “We show our cars about six or seven times a year,” Armada said. “We will be driving them to the gardens on February 22 and they will be on display from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Armada said that all of the cars have been restored with original parts and are not modified with other features.

“The model A cars are different from the model T in that they had more horsepower, different parts, and they were started by an electric switch and not by a crank,” Armada said.

The Ford motor company made over five million Model A cars between 1929 and 1931.

While the gardens are open almost every day of the year except Thanksgiving and Christmas, admission for the 76th anniversary on February 22 will be \$6 for adults and \$3 for children, half of the regular admission price. The gardens will be open from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., and the admission will include a free train ride, a tour of the historic mansion and the gardens, an exhibit of historic photographs and memorabilia provided by Flamingo Gardens archives and the Pines West Camera Club and the antique car display.

Flamingo Gardens is located at 3750 South Flamingo Road in Davie, between I-595 and Griffin Road.

FLAMINGO GARDENS CELEBRATES, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*,
Feb 21, 2003