



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Historic Platts/Backus House to Get “Extreme Yard Makeover” *Seminar series based on project to begin March 18*

Fort Pierce, FL — In an effort to conserve water and beautify landscaping at the newly refurbished office of Main Street Fort Pierce, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and several community partners will transform the garden area of the historic Platts/Backus House into an attractive Florida-friendly outdoor space.

The “*Extreme Yard Makeover*” will show how an unremarkable, water-hungry landscape can be turned into a lush, Florida-friendly landscape that will save its owner time, money and water, while contributing less pollution-laden stormwater runoff into the neighborhood. The yard will not only serve as a beautiful entrance to the Platts/Backus House and the residential area of downtown Fort Pierce, but also as a demonstration site for visitors and residents to learn about water conservation techniques.

The demonstration project is part of the District’s efforts to create a year-round water conservation ethic that can help protect the water supply from South Florida’s weather extremes, such as the parched conditions the region is currently experiencing. In addition to the project, the first of three free seminars will be held March 18 at the Platts/Backus House, located at 122 A.E. Backus Avenue, to teach residents and visitors how to improve water efficiency in their own yards.

Several organizations and businesses have committed to help Main Street Fort Pierce give the Platts/Backus House an “*Extreme Yard Makeover*,” and many have already started working behind the scenes. Greg Lewis of Conkling and Lewis Construction unearthed the old bathtub that artist A.E. “Beanie” Backus used as a decorative fountain in front of the house and is currently restoring it. Bill DuMond of Land South Design has drawn and donated landscaping plans for the yard. Gary Gleichman of Treasure Coast Irrigation and Landscape Inc. is working with Hunter Industries Inc. to donate the irrigation work and supplies for the project. Other partners for the project include:

- Wachovia Foundation
- City of Fort Pierce
- Lewis and Associates/Hap Lewis
- Fort Pierce Utilities Authority
- St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office
- Burkhart Construction
- St. Lucie County UF/IFAS Extension office

In June 2008, the District and dozens of partners successfully completed the first "Extreme Yard Makeover," transforming a residential "yard in need" in a highly visible area of Naples into a Florida-friendly landscape. Plans are complete for the new project at the Platts/Backus House, which was renovated by Main Street in 2006 to serve as the organization's office and community center. Yard preparation will begin soon, and installation will start later this month. The official unveiling of the new landscaping will take place in early April to commemorate Water Conservation Month.

The seminar series is being conducted in partnership with SFWMD, the St. Lucie County UF/IFAS Extension Office and the St. Lucie County Master Gardeners. The seminars include:

- ***Rain Barrels and Rain Gardens* – Wednesday, March 18 at noon**, Ken Gioeli, Natural Resources Agent at St. Lucie County UF/IFAS Extension Office;
- ***Native Plants & Wildflowers* – Wednesday, March 25 at noon**, St. Lucie County Master Gardener John Ray;
- ***Right Plant, Right Place and Improving Water Efficiency in Your Landscape* – Wednesday, April 1 at noon**, St. Lucie County Master Gardener Diane Goldberg.

To register for the workshops, contact Linette Trabulsy at (772) 223-2600, ext. 3605, or ltrabuls@sfwmd.gov. Seating is limited.

Due to continued dry conditions, landscape irrigation remains restricted to two days a week for the large majority of South Florida, home to approximately 7.5 million residents. Through the end of February, the 2008-2009 dry season is the third driest on record dating back to 1932. Rainfall was down 7.81 inches from the historical average from November 2 through March 13, and long-term forecasts call for persistent dry conditions to continue through at least April. More information about current irrigation limits by area is available on the District's [water restrictions](#) Web site.

For more information on Florida-friendly landscapes and water conservation tips, visit www.savewaterfl.com. For more information about the historic Platts/Backus House, visit www.mainstreetfortpierce.org.

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About the South Florida Water Management District – [Celebrating 60 Years \(1949-2009\)](#)

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.