

# HardisonInk.com

## Arbor Day celebrated with tree-planting lessons



Most of the planters and learners on Monday (Jan. 23) are seen here with their instructors -- Barbara Edmonds, Extension arborist with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Extension Office of Levy County, and Senior Forester Joe MacKenzie, the Levy County forester and Gilchrist County forester. Joining Edmonds and MacKenzie are Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs Inc. (GAMSDI) Founder and CEO Carol Borden, GAMSDI Director of Operations Chris Borden, GAMSDI Chief Operating Officer Mary Jo Brandt, Facility Executive Gary Foor, Facility Supervisor Charlie Jefferson, GAMSDI Trainer Dustin Hinkle, GAMSDI Trainer Meggan Leitch, GAMSDI Supervisor of Dog Care Specialists Carl Daniels, GAMSDI Dog Care Specialist Lacey Wallace, GAMSDI Dog Care Specialist Natalie Sauble, and two volunteers from the University of Florida (both members of the Delta Zeta sorority) Caitlin Montgomery, a sophomore, and Hannah Belcher, a junior. (not pictured, but active in the event as a videographer, UF IFAS Levy Extension Agriculture Technician Alvin Wilkerson)

### Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 24, 2017 at 2:57 p.m., All Rights Reserved

**LEVY COUNTY** -- A couple of trees -- one Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) and one Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) – started growing in their new home on Monday afternoon (Jan. 23), just outside of Williston.

Some trees at Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs Inc. (GAMSDI) were blown over in the recent hurricane and then windy day of Sunday, Mary Jo Brandt, chief operating officer at GAMSDI, said.

“Last year,” GAMSDI Founder and Chief Executive Officer Carol Borden said, “two hurricanes and a tropical storm resulted in the loss of several large oaks that provided valuable shade for our dogs.”

# HardisonInk.com



**Barbara Edmonds holds up a dried root ball as she teaches and Alvin Wilkerson records the lesson on video.**





# HardisonInk.com

Barbara Edmonds explains that the stake next to the new tree should be a couple of inches away to allow it to move a little in the breeze as it grows. This will help strengthen the tree in its early life.



Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs Inc. Facility Executive Gary Foor pulls one of the two trees from its pot as he prepares to help plant it. Some more digging was required around that hole to make it the best fit for the new home of the tree.

# HardisonInk.com



**County Forester Joe MacKenzie holds the Sassafras tree as Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs Inc. Director of Operations Chris Borden digs the hole for it. Borden had dug a few preliminary holes the day before. With instruction from an arborist, those holes were made to order to house the new trees.**

Borden said she is very appreciative of being selected as a location for a Levy County Arbor Day event.

Senior Forester Joe MacKenzie, the Levy County forester and Gilchrist County forester, accompanied Barbara Edmonds, Extension arborist with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Extension Office of Levy County, to teach all interested parties there how to plant trees properly.

Edmonds spent 30 to 45 minutes of instruction, which included digging and planting the two trees. These trees were leafless at this point and they were about five feet tall with a half-inch diameter for a trunk.

While she was the instructor, the hands on shovels included those by Chris Borden,

# HardisonInk.com

---

GAMSDI director of operations, Gary Foor, GAMSDI facility executive, Charlie Jefferson, GAMSDI facility supervisor, and others.

UF IFAS Levy Extension Ag Technician Alvin Wilkerson videotaped the program. Edmonds said she hopes to put this video on YouTube to help people learn best planting methods of new trees.

Edmonds shared insight concerning the depth to plant the trees; the distance under and around the newly planted trees for loosening the soil; methods to check roots that may be balled-up in a container; and other arbor-related matters to assure a strong likelihood for lively trees.

GAMSDI is medical service dogs' housing, training and breeding complex that includes locations in Williston, Tampa, LaBelle, Naples, Michigan and Illinois. German shepherds are the working dog of choice. These medical service dogs help people, including military veterans, with issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and with other handicaps.

The two trees are expected to grow and provide shade for dogs at GAMSDI in Levy County in the future.

Forester MacKenzie has enjoyed his first set of Arbor Day experiences as the two-counties' county forester.

Among the other many activities in Levy and Gilchrist counties where Forester MacKenzie and Arborist Edmonds participated was a tree-planting program at the new Williston Middle High School on Thursday (Jan. 19). There, they were joined by several Master Gardener volunteers.

Florida has celebrated Arbor Day since 1886 and has one of the first Arbor Day celebrations in the nation, on the third Friday in January, according to IFAS.

In excess of 200 communities in Florida celebrate Arbor Day, according to IFAS, either as a stand-alone event or in conjunction with some other occasion.

For questions about these or other gardening practices, please contact Edmonds at the UF/IFAS Extension Levy County by calling 352-486-5131 or send an email to her at [savemygarden@gmail.com](mailto:savemygarden@gmail.com)