

GROWING GAINS & PAINS

by Debra Wood

Nehrling Society Making Progress Toward Restoration

Leaves crunch underfoot, bamboo cracks in the breeze, and if one gives it a good try, it is easy to picture botanist **Henry Nehrling** wandering what remains of his experimental gardens in **Gotha**. During the 83 years since his death, the property has enjoyed good stewardship, but also times when owners could no longer tend to the rapidly growing vegetation.

Most recently, the **Henry Nehrling Society** stepped forward to save this Central Florida cultural and historical treasure, purchasing the property for \$450,000. Volunteers cleared invasive plants, replaced rotting porch steps and railings, and trimmed plants.



▲▶ The 1880-era home at **Nehrling Gardens**, which is being restored, is open to the public the second Sunday of each month.

During the past two years, the volunteer organization achieved what many people feared was impossible — saving the property.



Brenda

BRYANT

PHOTOGRAPHY

WWW.BBP-STUDIOS.COM

Maternity * Newborn

Children * Families



407-362-7089

20 S. MAIN ST., STE 290, WINTER GARDEN



yelp

"It's an incredible jewel," said **Theresa Schretzmann-Myers**, a recent tour guide. "We are committed to saving it."

A few months ago, the group opened the storied property for tours, inviting people to walk through Nehrling's 1880-era home, explore the grounds and soak up the atmosphere.

Former owner **Barbara Bochiardy** sat on a rocker on the porch, greeting newcomers and talking about her years living in the house. She praised the

society for doing a great job, but said that she misses the peace and quiet of living there.

Nehrling relocated to Gotha from Sheboygan, Wis., and moved the home by ox cart to what was then Lake Audubon (now Lake Nally), where he created Palm Cottage Gardens. He experimented with tropical and subtropical plants, testing more than 3,000 new and rare species for the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the 60-acre site. He introduced caladiums, hybrid

SouthWest Aquatics



Swimming is too important.
Your child is too valuable
to not choose an expert.

407-905-0999
info@SouthWestAquatics.com



Now offering swimming
at Windermere Prep!

amaryllis and glorioşa lilies to the Florida landscape. Nature lovers and other people visited the property, including President Theodore Roosevelt and world-famous inventor Thomas Edison.

Many of Nehrling's plants still remain. The property now includes only the 6-acre homestead site, a portion of which extends into the lake.

The well-preserved home, complete with heart-pine floors and a sleeping porch, remains much as it was in Nehrling's day. People can walk through the rooms and gain a sense of what life was like at the turn of the 20th century.

Posters in the living room show what the home and gardens looked like in the past, and books authored by Nehrling are placed for browsing. The society uses the former kitchen wing as an office, with furnishings donated by the **Winter Garden Historical Society**. A Boy Scout troop recently repaired the sleeping porch and steps leading from it to the gardens.



▲ **Theresa Schretzmann-Myers** guides **Nehrling Gardens** visitors on a walk to Lake Nally.

Volunteers have cleared pathways through the property and created both a pollination and a demonstration garden.

Visitors can marvel at the 225-year-old Sago palm, a podocarpus towering above a dilapidated greenhouse, and a sky-high long-leaf pine found in the gardens.

Please see **GROWING GAINS**, next page

GROWING GAINS, from previous page

"We're finding some really cool stuff on the property," Schretzmann-Myers said.

Volunteers are still discovering new species.

Individuals and organizations have "adopted" trees and pay for their maintenance. Honorary deeds for 1 square yard of property raise funds for restoration. Memberships to the society begin at \$15.

"The society aims to create a horticultural educational and wetland restoration center on the property," said **Craig Burness**, first vice president of the society.



▲ **Barbara Bochiardy**, the former owner of **Nehrling Gardens**, greets visitors.

Did you miss ...

BABIES &
Baby Boomers

*Visit us
online at*

www.southwestorlandobulletin.com

Meanwhile, work continues to clean up the gardens, restore the home and pay off the mortgage. Donations of time and money will move the work forward.

"We have so many projects inside and outside," Schretzmann-Myers said. "More people are needed to save the site."

Nehrling Gardens, located at 2267 Hempel Ave. in Gotha, is open to the public from noon-4 p.m. on the second Sunday of each month. There is no charge for admission; however, a \$5 donation is encouraged. ■