

**Zoned Out: Ringling Grounds Beautification**

**Lyn Bourne-Weick**

The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art and Center for Performing Arts  
Florida State University

## ***Abstract***

*Using a zone ownership concept, the Ringling Museum Grounds Crew worked as a team to restore and beautify the grounds of the 66-acre campus, which was in disrepair. Outsourcing this work would have cost \$385,000 plus, compared to the Museum cost of \$241,521 in salaries and fringe benefits. Beyond the cost savings of \$143,479, the zoning concept created a healthy competition among the crew, increasing employee morale and pride in their work. The Grounds Crew was also able to become more self-directed. The beautification of a campus that had been in disrepair resulted in a magnificent setting that adds to the enjoyment of approximately 280,000 annual visitors.*

## **Introduction of the Organization**

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and The Center for Performing Arts are affiliated with Florida State University.

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is the largest museum/university complex in the Nation. The 66-acre estate is the legacy of John Ringling (1866-1936), one of the great business tycoons of his day. The Museum of Art, recognized as the State Art Museum of Florida, includes 21 galleries of internationally recognized European and American art with paintings by Rubens, Van Dyck, Poussin and other Baroque masters. In addition, the estate encompasses Cà d' Zan, the recently restored 32-room Ringling mansion; the Circus Museum' the Original Asolo Theater; the Rose Garden and beautifully landscaped grounds overlooking Sarasota Bay.

The Center for Performing Arts is the home of the professional Asolo Theater Company performing in the Mertz Theater, which was brought to Sarasota from Dunfermline, Scotland. The Center is also home of the Masters in Fine Arts Degree program FSU Conservatory for Actor Training. Their performances are held in the intimate Cook Theater. And finally, the Sarasota Ballet conducts training classes and holds performances in the Mertz Theater.

## **Statement of the Problem/Initiative**

- The Ringling Museum had been left in disrepair until the Florida Legislature placed it under Florida State University's purview in 2002.
- The University challenged the Museum to repair and beautify the 66-acre estate.
- Outsourcing grounds maintenance was estimated at an annual cost of \$385,000. There was no additional funding for this initiative therefore, improvements had to be made with existing resources. The Grounds Crew rose to the challenge.

## **Design**

The Grounds Crew instituted a concept of zone ownership. The 66-acres were divided into four quadrants and crewmembers were rotated through each quadrant, so that while the landscaping duties were the same, the scenery was different. Each of the crewmembers developed a pride of ownership for the quadrant for which they were responsible and it enabled them to become more self-directed. This approach created healthy competition among the crew for not only the beautification project, but for on-going maintenance. Professional growth was encouraged among the crew, and two employees subsequently received their pesticide application specialist certification. This resulted in additional savings of \$9,000 per year in professional pesticide application fees.

## **Implementation**

- The newly hired Grounds Supervisor did an assessment of the operation's strengths and weaknesses. He identified areas of improvement and prioritized them. He then focused the crew's efforts on the top two priorities and worked his way down the list.
- He worked closely with crewmembers at the start of a project, and then turned it over to them. At the same time, additional training and instruction of equipment operation was provided to the crew so that they could take on more responsibility.
- The use of an outside irrigation contractor and insecticide contractor were eliminated. The crew took over these responsibilities, and now performs all irrigation repairs, maintenance and insecticide applications.
- The grounds were divided into four zones, and crewmembers were rotated through each zone to increase pride of ownership. To a large extent, they began working as self-directed teams.
- New bed lines and clearly defined landscape beds were created.
- Mulch was introduced into beds that had none, and beds that had little mulch were topped off.
- Dead and decaying material was removed.
- Trees were trimmed.

## Benefits

- In-sourcing resulted in annual recurring savings of \$143,479.
- Staff morale was increased, as well as employee ownership, pride, and professional development.
- The improvement in the grounds received State and National Recognition:
  - Mable Ringling's Rose Garden was chosen by the American Rose Society as an Award of Excellence Test Garden. There are only six other gardens in the United States qualified to evaluate miniature rose hybrids.
  - The project received a Florida Tax Watch Davis Productivity Award – Team Award (Plaque) – June 2004
  - The grounds were featured in *Turf: The Magazine for Turf Care Professionals* – July, 2003  
(See article at [http://www.ringling.org/pages/a\\_main\\_frame.html](http://www.ringling.org/pages/a_main_frame.html) )
- The increased level of visitor satisfaction is apparent from the monthly tabulation of visitor comments and satisfaction ratings. Visitor comments have gone from “gardens neglected” to “an exquisite and beautiful site”, “Mr. Ringling must be proud”.