

# Martin

## COUNTY

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## Award shows Hearts

By Paul Ivice

Special to Treasure Coast Newspapers

**PALM CITY** – What began as a seed of an idea grew in about a year into a community-supported garden in the Mars Hill section of Jensen Beach in a park that had fallen into disrepair.

For germinating the idea that became Friendly Hearts Community Gardens Park, Jensen Beach native Robert Delancy received the President's Award on Wednesday night at the Keep Martin Beautiful annual banquet at Piper's Landing Yacht & Country Club.

"The Mars Hill project, spearheaded by Mr. Delancy, personifies the mission of KMB," said board President Rhonda Irons. "This grassroots effort is helping to transform the community.

Delancy, now a 60-year-old Port St. Lucie resident who retired from the criminal investigations division of the Internal Revenue Service, said he was inspired after he drove past the little-used park in August 2010.

He remembered that when he was a child a group of women, the Friendly Hearts Club, bought the property and developed it into a park for children, with playground equipment and a basketball court.

Now there are few children in Mars Hill. Delancy said he wanted to "do

something for those women who bought that land so long ago, and do something for the community."

He mentioned the idea of a community garden to landscape architect Mike Flaugh, who quickly created a layout.

Word spread and soon Delancy was receiving donations from all parts of the community, in the form of money, labor and supplies.

Delancy said he put in about \$10,000 on his own as the donations grew to almost \$80,000 worth, about one-third in cash.

With vendors discounting their work, landscaping, 56 wooden planters, a well and an automatic sprinkler system were installed.

People from all over

Martin County have cultivated plants, mostly vegetables, in the planters, though 10 are still uncommitted, Delancy said.

"It's a very diverse cross-section of the community and always very inspiring to see the work that's being done," Delancy said.

Then County Commissioner Doug Smith kicked in a \$35,000 grant from the county that paid for construction of a pavilion over the basketball court, with benches, picnic tables and two barbecue grills.

Because of the success of the Friendly Hearts Community Garden, Delancy said, other groups in Martin County are interested in starting similar projects and have asked for his guidance.

### WINNERS OF 2012 ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AWARDS

**President's Award:** Robert Delancy, Friendly Hearts Community Gardens

**Community Champion:** Jane Mills, dedication and service to RotaKids program

**Raleigh "Riley" Jackson Award:** John King Wakeman, lifetime service

**AT&T Innovation Award:** Felix A. Williams Elementary School, Felix's Farm

**Waste Management "Think Green" Sustainability Award:** Zach Wilcox, creation of memorial butterfly garden

**Unsung Hero:** Frank Neff, Habitat Angel

**Nonprofit & Civic Group:** Tobacco-Free Partnership of Martin County

**Youth/School Program:** Evie Flaugh and Naia Mader, River Kidz

**Government Agency:** Martin County Artificial Reef Program, Kyle Conrad Memorial Reef

**Professional/Business:** Southeastern Printing Co., Green Business Initiatives