

# LAKE EOLA HEIGHTS' HORTICULTURAL HERITAGE

By Jeff Thompson, RLA

This is a big shout out to thank the volunteers who continually attend the neighborhood's Roundabout Round Ups! Residents of Lake Eola Heights have no other community space to call our own, so over the years we have developed a sense of pride in the neighborhood's roundabouts.

The fall Round Up recently concluded with 10 volunteers in attendance. We have come to rely on a hardy landscape palette of natives and bromeliads in order to minimize our maintenance efforts. These plants are so tough that they will thrive without irrigation, which is a big plus for the environment. And we included the bromeliads because of the special relationship they have with our neighborhood.

Orlando was home to Mulford Foster, the most recognized bromeliad collector of his generation. He moved to Florida in 1923 and arrived in Orlando a few years later, eventually establishing Tropical Arts Nursery and its adjacent Latch String Tea Room with his wife Racine at the NW corner of Magnolia and Colonial. It was very prominent in Orlando's early horticultural scene. Mulford was a self-trained naturalist and landscape architect, discovering 200 new species of bromeliads in South and Central America. He also introduced the *Tabebuia umbellata* tree to North America via Orlando and was a talented painter with several of his works being housed with the collections at Leu Gardens and UCF. The Sentinel Star (now Orlando Sentinel) was located across the street from the Tropical Arts Nursery, so they sponsored *Tabebuia* give-aways which helped to spread the tree throughout the region in the 1950s and 1960s.

So over the years Orlando's downtown neighborhoods became the beneficiaries of his design acumen and several species of bromeliads as they began to populate local gardens and landscapes (including the *Neoregelia spectabilis* that ended up in our roundabouts). About 25 years ago there was a house on Ridgewood at Mills that was torn down. It had bromeliads growing everywhere ... on the ground, in the trees, even on walls and sidewalks. Many resourceful neighbors collected these bromeliads and they thrived. As the Roundabouts were gradually re-landscaped to focus on a lower maintenance plant palette, the scrappy *Neoregelias* found their way into the roundabouts.

The bromeliads have done so well that some

of them have found a new home in the nearby Mills 50 Main Street District. The LEHHNA Roundabout Roundup was followed by a Green Up project for Mills 50 the following weekend. The salvaged bromeliads were installed around several of the Chinese Fan palms on Mills Ave. as a test to see how well they will perform. If all goes well over the next few years, bromeliads will be added to the rest of the palm planters. And thanks to all of the volunteers for helping with the Mills 50 Green Up! Several intrepid volunteers participated in both events!

"Fostering" Lake Eola Heights' horticulture heritage and spreading its bromeliad legacy is a wonderful way to remember some of those pioneering plant collectors and how they introduced these plants so many years ago.

Happy gardening!

## REZONING HILLCREST AND HOWARD

A proposal to allow neighborhood children to stay at Hillcrest and Howard schools is set for a discussion with school officials on April 14, 2016, at 4:30 p.m. at the school board offices, 445 W. Amelia St.

Residents are asking for geographic preference, or the right to remain in their neighborhood schools before potential magnet seats are given to students from elsewhere in the district.

Hillcrest Elementary and Howard Middle School will become zoneless and accept only magnet students. This means that children who live in Lake Eola Heights and other downtown neighborhoods will have to drive or bus their children out of downtown to a new K-8 being built at the current site of Lake Como Elementary.

The changes are sparked by the opening of three new schools that will serve students in preschool or kindergarten through eighth grade. The new schools in Audubon Park and Parramore will open in 2017, while the Lake Como school will open in 2018. In addition to the new schools, the district plans to close the Fern Creek, Kaley and Lake Como elementary schools.



## MEETING SIGNS

If you have a meeting sign, please place it out no later than Sunday, November 8, and take it in no later than Sunday, November 15.

***Bookmark it! [www.lehhna.com](http://www.lehhna.com) Stay informed!***