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A living roof

Marie Selby Botanical Gardens transforms the top of a cistern into an educational tool.



1. Before the green roof installation
 2. Workers install drainage matting and retention material
 3. After the green roof installation



Marie Selby Botanical Gardens' Donna Krabill, center, enjoys the roof's grand opening with Grant Castilow, left, and Steve Ellis, right, co-owners of MyGreenBuildings.
 Photo courtesy of MyGreenBuildings

SARASOTA It was a labor of love for the green at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, and not the paper kind.

Selby is a source of environmental education, so it was only natural that installing a green roof on the grounds would enhance seminars and workshops.

The grand opening of the green roof was held Sept. 29, after about three months of work. Since there's nothing similar in the immediate area, the team had to figure things out as they went along. The green roof was installed on top of a cistern, making it easily accessible since it's not far off the ground.

"We were looking at this flat roof and thought we should do a green roof because it would be a great teaching tool since you don't have to climb a ladder to access it," said Donna Krabill, director of Selby's Center for Environmental Education. She managed the project and worked with a team of contributors.

The 1,000-square-foot roof features native grasses, drought-resistant plants not native to Florida, succulents and groundcover, all donated from Florida nurseries from Apopka to Venice. It works to keep temperatures low and is effective for storm water mitigation because it slows water down and traps it, where plants and rocks clean it before it goes back into the water system.

"You have to get your roof engineered to be sure you have the right kind of roof and decide what load it can take," Krabill said. "Purposes for having green roofs range from lowering energy bills to having parties in a full garden. A lot of hospitals

Krabill raised \$1,000 for supplies and worked with local nurseries and other companies that donated time and materials.

MyGreenBuildings, in particular, helped pull the project together, Krabill said.

Steve Ellis, co-owner of MyGreenBuildings in Sarasota, works with Krabill to develop seminars at the botanical gardens so the relationship was already in place when the roof idea surfaced. The green builder has been in business since 2006, though he and business partner Grant Castilow have 50 years of combined construction experience.

"We were very excited to be a part of it," said Ellis. "What better place to have a green roof than a botanical garden?"

Ellis said his company donated the construction, permitting, engineering, design and construction. Sutter Roofing donated products, as did Sika Sarnafil, which provided drainage matting and retention materials.

One of the biggest hurdles was creating the proper soil, according to Krabill. So she worked with the University of Central Florida, which in the end donated a formula.

"You can't just put in potting soil," Krabill said. "It takes a real special mixture."

UCF donated the formula, which Krabill took and was able to find the components for at cost from businesses around the state. She raised \$700 for that portion of the project.

"We're very, very lucky we live in a great community that's excited about going green," Krabill said.

Krabill plans to hold a seminar about green roofs in the spring.