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NEIGHBORS

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9 SOUTHWEST BROWARD



GREEN THUMBS UP

A. ENRIQUE VALENTIN / Miami Herald Staff

Lucy Clements gets some gardening tips from horticulture instructors Robert Bornstein, center, and Pete Collins at South Florida State Hospital. The hospital is now

using a return-to-the-earth therapy approach to help some of its patients relax and build confidence and self-esteem. **Please see story, Page 3.**

Gardens help hospital's clients grow in confidence, self-esteem

By **FRANK FERNANDEZ**
Herald Staff Writer

Tucked amid the drab institutional buildings on the grounds of South Florida State Hospital are colorful gardens of flowers, vegetables and fruits.

But the crop harvested from these gardens is more than tomatoes, peppers and mangoes and a happy splash of color from impatiens. The gardens are part of a horticultural program that helps create pride and confidence for people with mental illnesses.

And for the first time in its five-year history the program is going public — with a plant sale Friday on the hospital grounds in Pembroke Pines. Buyers can choose from a variety of potted plants, hanging baskets, dish gardens, flowering plants and herbs.

The horticultural therapy program is part of START — Short Term Adult Residential Treatment program — said program director Don Young. The program, offered by the North Miami Community Mental Health Center, tries to help individuals with mental illnesses by providing counseling, social-skills training and problem-solving skills. Clients from the Transit Co., a long-term care program for clients with mental illnesses, also participate in the horticultural program.

Lucy Clements, 37, a client who is near-

ing completion of the four-month START program, said she enjoys working in the gardens.

"It's nice to work with your hands," she said. "It's relaxing to work with nature. It's just good to get dirty sometimes."

The START program has 18 clients and room for up to 20.

"You are able to nurture something that is alive," Young said. "They kind of like to relate it to themselves — something that's alive and growing."

"They feel they don't have any control over themselves, but with plants they feel they have that control," he said.

Besides a sense of control, the program pumps them with confidence that might help them join the job market. Robert Bornstein, the horticultural therapy supervisor, said the horticultural program also gives clients the opportunity to work outside the hospital and earn money. The program has a contract to water and care for plants in the HRS main offices in Miami and a Northwest Dade Community Mental Health Center in Hialeah.

Bornstein said the program has grown in the past 2½ years, initially providing relaxation with basic gardening, and now teaching the business of horticulture.

"We've expanded it to include vocational work," he said. "We've made it more into a nursery, where before it was



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just a therapeutic shade house."

The program doesn't benefit just clients. South Florida State Hospital benefits by having its grounds beautified.

Christopher Glenn Camerucci, 18, has been in the program two weeks.

"I like it," he said. "It gives me a chance to have experiences with other

people. It's great. It's like a big garden out here."

To get to the plant sale, go to the hospital entrance on Pembroke Road west of University Drive and ask the guard for directions to the sale. For more information, call START at 967-7375. The hours for the sale are 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Friday.