



The water is in constant movement, flowing from waterfall to pond to concrete walkway on the hilltop. This movement cleanses the water by moving it through rock and plantings.

Lebanon Station, a modern day Hanging Gardens

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The approach to the Garden sloped like a hillside and the several parts of the structure rose from one another tier on tier... On all this, the earth had been piled... and was thickly planted.... The water machines [raised] the water in great abundance...

Babylon's Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, have long fascinated the curious. The ancient Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, in writing the above account of the gardens, had never seen them. Some doubt their very existence.

However, a modern-day twin of the ancient wonder does exist in Levy County.

Local developer Danny Stevens and his crew of master crafts workers have created their own Hanging Gardens along Highway 19/98 near Inglis, even though Stevens had something far different in mind when he bought the 21 acres of commercial property three years ago.

"I buy property, clean it up, put roadways in and sell it. My intention with Lebanon Station was to clean it up and put a fence around it," Stevens said. "It will be valuable when this area grows."

If the area does boom, as Stevens believes it will, it won't be the first time. He said 70 or so years ago most of the county's industrial activity revolved around Lebanon Station, Gulf Hammock, Cedar Key and Inglis. Lebanon Station was the site of a railroad station and at one time had stores, restaurants and a train station.

Dixie Lime and Stone had property on the railway at Lebanon Station. They hauled in rock and processed it for road construction and agricultural operations.

Dixie sold the land 35 to 40 years ago to a group of men who turned the acreage into Brooks Hunting Camp. Stevens bought the property from them.

Stevens brought in David Wallace, who owns H₂O Well Drilling in Williston, to help clean up the property. Much of that work involved taking down and hauling off a hill, a remnant of Dixie's rock crushing activities.

Stevens, Wallace and his crew began tearing down the hill.

"We started taking the hill down and one night as David and I were closing up we looked at that hill. We decided we should do something different." Wallace thought a waterfall would be a good idea.

Wallace's crew, master craftspeople all, built a waterfall on one edge of the hill. Jim Alexander, Tina Wallace, Jerry Alexander, David and Ted Summers and Billy Mero are skilled in the arts of welding, carpentry, masonry and concrete work. Bobby Lindsey assists as a heavy equipment operator. Another key figure is Catherine Lawhun, whose engineering company, Many Waters Resource Network, is assisting to gain the required permits and approvals from area agencies.

"Once we got the one

waterfall done, we decided we needed more," Stevens said.

From there the project just evolved.

It was Wallace who also introduced Stevens to Dr. Ray Webber, an endodontist and diver. Webber is the driving force behind the Devil's Den, a spring inside a dry cave near Alachua. Stevens said Webber is the inspiration for Lebanon Station.

Wallace also brought in Holly Jensen, a critical care nurse at an area hospital.

"Holly showed up one day and started bringing plants and she's still bringing them," Stevens said.

While Jensen is not trained in landscaping, she is responsible for the numerous plantings at Lebanon Station. "Plants are my hobby," she said.

So beautiful are the landscape and hardscape features, visitors to Lebanon Station assume the site is the work of registered and degreed landscape architects.

The hill, as the most prominent feature, both reflects Jensen's talent and the evolving nature of the project overall.

"Every time it rained, dirt would cover up Holly's plants," Stevens said. The crew built three retaining walls to prevent erosion. While craftsmen were working on the stabilization, they noticed the incredible views from the hill's top. A concrete walkway at the



Entwined trees. A cabbage palm and live oak hold fast to each other. As far as trees go, "these are the aristocrats in Florida," Stevens said.

top of the hill serves as a lookout point.

The tropicals, natives and pond plants are not the only remarkable botanical life on the site. Two pairs of trees, each with a cabbage palm and live oak, are found in a lovers' embrace.

"I keep thinking I'll run into a hunter or someone who can tell me they know where trees like this are, but no one does, except for one in St. Augustine. That one

is famous — they call it the love tree," Stevens said.

Lebanon Station will surely become famous in its own right in Levy County. Stevens encourages people to visit the grounds and spend an hour or two.

For the short-term, Stevens and his artisans will continue the project just to see where it leads. According to Stevens, that could perhaps be an RV park, an office complex or housing. "We don't know just yet. We have to see where the growth takes us."

That growth, hopefully, will not destroy the serenity Stevens and his crew are creating. ■

Lebanon Station is accessible to the public. All Stevens and his craftspeople ask is that visitors not disturb, destroy or trash the site. It is located on Highway 19/98 at County Route 121.



The talented craftsmen and women responsible for bringing the Lebanon Station project to fruition. Bottom row, left to right: Jim Alexander, Tina Wallace, Jerry Alexander, Back row: Holly Jensen, David Summers, Ted Summers, Billy Mero. Two key project members, David Wallace and Catherine Lawhun, were not present for the photo.



Smaller waterfall at northwest portion of property. Water tank on stilts resembles an old watering station.

Landscaping. Hardscape features are meant to invoke the train station theme. The rusty old metal equipment now used for planters and waterfall spillways comes from trucks, earth-moving equipment and of course, trains.