GIVE A BOOST

Exotic Gardens For Acadiana Also Help To Handicapped

If plans work out, you won't have to go around the world to see beautiful and exotic plants and flowers. They'll be growing right here in Lafayette at the Around-the-World Tropical Gardens on Ridge Rd.

Not only that, but the gardens would be tended by trained handicapped workers who ordinarily find it difficult to obtain employment.

The project is the brainchild of the Lafayette Association for Retarded Children and significantly, has the endorsement of Gov. Edwin Edwards, Commissioner of Welfare Garland Bonin, Dr. J. A. Porel, head of USL's Department of Plant Industry, Dr. Henry G. Pitchford, chairman of USL's sub-committee on cultural and recreational opportunities.

The gardens would provide employment for handicapped workers. They would also provide a badly needed tourist attraction. (In time, Lafayette could have another Hodgson Gardens or Busch Gardens.)

The gardens, in addition, would serve as an excellent educational and employment facility for handicapped persons. As the Association sympathetically points out about the retarded, "It has been said that God has compensated in some measure for their slow minds by providing them with 'green thumbs.' They are punctual and faithful workers, but they are in desperate need of jobs within their capabilities."

The plan hinges upon one contingency, one that requires immediate public support. The Association has a very good chance of obtaining a grant to buy plants, tools, watering and heating equipment, and other needed materials from the Council for Development Disabilities, an agency established to support innovative programs for Louisiana's handicapped citizens. To acquire these monies, however, matching funds of 30% are required.

Some contributions have been received thus far, but not enough to qualify for a grant. The LARC is in urgent need of donors and has a brief campaign underway seeking $5 or more from citizens interested in the project. Each donation will go a long way toward obtaining matching funds, but a deadline of March 29 (that's next Thursday) has been set for raising the money, but it's coming in slow. If you are interested in supporting a humanitarian, civic, and cultural project, you may send a donation to the Lafayette Assn. for Retarded Children, attention Mrs. Hilda Welch, women's news editor, The Advertiser, P. O. Box 3288, Lafayette.

The Council for Development Disabilities says that land can not be purchased with grant funds or used for matching purposes. But that stipulation poses no worry for LARC. Fortunately, the Allemand family gave them land on Ridge Rd, some time ago. The four acres will be used as a plant nursery and training facility for handicapped workers. It works in ideally, having a tropical garden as a natural adjunct to this aesthetic and economic program.

Lafayette is in a favored zone for cultivation of such a horticultural attraction. In fact, beautiful plants have graced the landscape of the Gulf Coast for so long that one is apt to forget their tropical origins. It is planned to develop these acres on Ridge Rd as distinctive gardens displaying plants of the West Indies, Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, Latin America—and the Gulf Coast. Hardy plants will be cultivated outdoors and tender exotics displayed in greenhouses.

Support to this project will lend not only beauty to the landscape, but also new hope and a brighter day to the handicapped.