

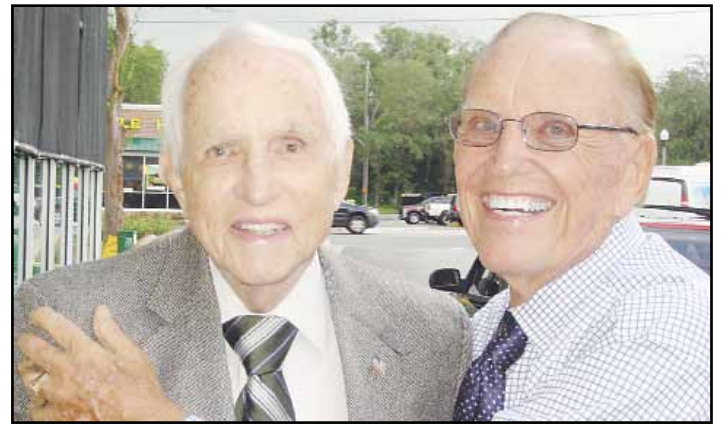
McDonald's celebrates 40 years with special proclamation



Barbara Allegro (l-r) and Bob Allegro, owners of the Apopka McDonald's, stand in front of their photo taken in 1972, the year the restaurant opened. The couple moved to Apopka because they wanted to raise their children in a small town with a big heart.



Mayor John H. Land proclaimed Saturday, September 15 as 'Bob Allegro Day' in Apopka. Pictured are, (front row, l-r) Millie Hae-fely, Land, Barbara Allegro; back row, Mark Allegro, son; Bob Allegro, Ronald McDonald; and Greg Allegro, son.



City of Apopka Mayor John H. Land (left) and Bob Allegro have enjoyed a close friendship for more than 40 years. Allegro said Land was the first person he met in Apopka. (See correction on page 2A.)



Monterey Mushrooms (upper left) sits on 80 acres of land in Zellwood. General Manager Brian Hesse (upper center) shines a flashlight on the growing mushroom spawns. The mushrooms (lower left) double in size every 24 hours. If left alone, the white dots in the soil grow into mushrooms. The management staff are (lower center, l-r), Leslie Block, sales manager; Sonia Perez, sales coordinator; Jorge Flores, packing manager; Brian Hesse, general manager; Don Ingram, maintenance manager; Byron Irmeger, operations manager; Dave Tatje, master grower; Juan Rodriguez, harvesting manager; Marlin Gauna, accounting; and Jackie Hopkins, transportation. Ladies on an assembly line (right photo) weigh and pack the mushrooms.



'My, how fast you grow!' Monterey mushrooms double in 24 hours

By Sherry Brunson
Apopka Chief Staff

There is fungus among us – a fungus business that is. Although Monterey Mushrooms has been quietly located off the main thoroughfare and tucked away at 5949 Sadler Road in Zellwood for approximately 40 years, it bustles with activity.

"We grow gourmet white and baby bella and portabella brown mushrooms," said Brian Hesse, general manager. "Even though Monterey Mushrooms is a national company, we have local farms so that we can deliver locally to anywhere in the U.S."

The process is so precise, Hesse said, that mushrooms shipped out every evening will be in the stores the next day.

Within the moist walls of the farm, which was purchased from Ralston Purina, mushrooms can be found in various stages of development. The growth process for the mushrooms mandates numerous special touches to insure they will be just the right size in the usual 90-day three-phase harvest

cycle.

Before the mushroom growing process, its growing medium begins a 26-day composting phase. Monterey Mushrooms uses a mixture approximately 50 percent wheat straw, purchased from Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina (they receive 15 semi-truck loads per week), and add local horse stable straw from Ocala and the Hollywood racetrack. The mixture is also sprinkled with recycled water from the farm lagoon.

Each batch of mushrooms has its own batch of compost. The process that causes the compost to heat up to approximately 150-degrees produces a chemical reaction.

Poultry waste, gypsum and urea are later added to the mixture. Through the process, a huge mixer travels up and down the rows of compost twice a day to stir up the compound. The poultry manure equals about 10 percent of the compost, Hesse said.

Phase two begins when the compost is mixed with vegetable oil and more water, and then

filled into large wooden trays and pasteurized at 140-degrees for two hours to destroy all bad bacteria before being placed in a cool controlled environment for four-to-five days to stabilize the nutrients.

Next, the mushroom "spawn" or mycelium that has been sprayed on to a millet seed as a host is distributed into the trays of prepared compost and placed in coolers to propagate for 15 days.

The spawn are sprayed onto the millet seeds at the Monterey Mushrooms "spawn" factory, Amycel, Inc., in Madisonville, Texas. Amycel, Inc. provides approximately 90 percent of all mushroom spawn in the world.

At the end of the 14 days, peat moss, limestone and water are applied to each fully propagated tray, Hesse said. The spawn continues to grow through the casing layer for four or five days and the room temperature is dropped to 65 degrees for another nine days. The drop in temperature and controlled environment brings about the mushroom growth.

"The mushroom thinks it is going to die so it shoots up a growth," Hesse said. "When you buy the mushrooms at the store, and there is black stuff around the stem, that is the peat moss, and it will easily come off."

Hesse said the cool temperature controls are mainly to keep the temperature down in the compost, which would become hot enough to melt PCV pipe if left alone. A maintenance staff monitors the equipment 24/7 to make sure electricity is always provided. An on-site generator is available if there is a power outage.

The mushroom trays are then transferred to the harvesting side of the farm, which has 40 growing rooms, divided by two main corridors. Each room is temperature controlled at about 60 to 65-degrees.

The mushrooms double in size every 24 hours, so cannot be left alone even for holidays. The mushroom crop is harvested by hand in three picks over a 21-day period.

Each worker is given a specific row to pick so they are

in control of its production and can take pride in their yields, Hesse said.

A master grower is on the grounds 24-hours-a-day to watch the crop.

After the mushrooms are picked, they are brought to the clean and ready room and exposed to an ultraviolet light for 12 seconds.

"The mushrooms have a skin, just like we do," Hesse said. "When we place them under the ultraviolet light, they absorb Vitamin D that is transferred to people during consumption."

The picked mushrooms are immediately placed in a vacuum cooler and chilled to 34-degrees to maintain freshness. They are then packed/packaged in vented plastic to the buyer's specifications, placed in refrigerated trucks and delivered to markets throughout the southeast within 24 hours of harvest.

"The mushrooms would keep growing if they were not cooled," Hesse said.

The trays, on the other hand, are placed into a "post-crop room" where they are

heated up to 160-degrees to kill any remaining bacteria, then emptied, Hesse said. The compost, which is still full of nutrients, is sold to area gardeners.

The regional impact of Monterey Mushrooms is significant. The Zellwood location has 385 year-round employees and ships 70,000 pounds of mushrooms every day to grocery distribution centers for Winn-Dixie, Walmart, Target, Costco, Sysco, U.S. Foods, and others in Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

The Zellwood location is one of 11 Monterey locations throughout the U.S. and Mexico.

Hesse said second- and third-generation family members of some of their employees currently work at the farm.

"We are proud of our college scholarship program for our employees," Hesse said. "There are numerous full scholarships that they have taken advantage of."

For more information, visit www.montereymushrooms.com.

Autumn is the best time to view the wildflowers in Central Florida

By Sherry Brunson
Apopka Chief Staff

Thanks to the upcoming fall wildflower season, Apopka residents can add one more thing to their list of beautiful things to see in upcoming weeks.

"We are coming into the flowering season," said Nancy Prine, a long-time landscaper, board member of Friends of the Wekiva River and chairwoman of the Wekiva River System Advisory Management Committee. "The fall flowers are beautiful and they attract butterflies. There are yellows, purples and blues blooming – everything is coming out. The forest changes dramatically, almost weekly during this time. A hike through the park (Wekiva Springs State Park or Kelly Park) would probably be the best way to see them. There is also a very good display on the north shore of Lake Apopka."



Lisa Roberts, executive director of the Florida Wildflower Foundation, shared before (left photo) and after (right photo) photos of her backyard. Wildflowers need significantly less water than their cousins. The end of September through October is the wildflower season in Central Florida.

Prine said the wiregrass, which is the ground cover that grows under most of the state park's pine flat woods, is currently blooming and is worth seeing.

Lisa Roberts, executive director of the Florida Wildflower Foundation, said fall is the best time of the year for wildflowers.

She also recommended hiking one of the trails at Kelly

through October, Roberts said. "On our website, we have a 'What's Blooming' area where people can see in photos what is blooming," Roberts said. "A lot of people don't realize that bees have a symbiotic relationship with wildflowers. The bees depend on nectar from the wildflowers while the crops are growing. The bees pollinate 30 percent of the crops that are needed to grow



much of our food. If we didn't have the wildflowers to keep the bees, we wouldn't have the food produced either. It's up to us to keep things growing and to keep the chain going."

Roberts encourages local residents to grow wildflowers because they save water and energy since they need less water than imported varieties. She recommended interested parties visit Plantrealflorida.org

to find local professionals and nurseries that work with wildflowers.

"I started gardening at home with wildflowers and I love it," Roberts said. "It makes such a difference."

The fourth annual Florida Wildflower Symposium will be held September 28-29 in partnership with the Wings & Wildflowers Festival in Lake County.

The symposium will feature wildflower walks, workshops on photography, starting a small plant from seed, wildflower propagation and make-and-take rain barrels.

Roberts will teach a free class during the festival, "Start Gardening with Wildflowers," on Friday, September 28, at 10:30 a.m. at the Hickory Point Recreational Park, Room 2B, 27341 State Road 19, Tavares.

For more information about Florida wildflowers, visit <http://flawildflowers.org>.