

OrlandoSentinel.com

Leesburg uses novel irrigation system to save water

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October 6, 2009

LEESBURG — City environmental officials recently teamed up with a local irrigation-system developer to help keep scenic areas in subdivisions and city areas hydrated without the use of groundwater.

The city is cutting down on its groundwater use working with local business owner Rufus Holloway and his pioneering irrigation system that uses rainwater to keep up with landscaping needs.

"It's a unique application," said Ray Sharp, Leesburg's director of environmental services. "If we capture rainfall, we preserve our groundwater resources."

Holloway developed the system more than a decade ago, in which storm runoff is collected, recycled and applied to plants at his research area and tree farm on Griffin Road in Leesburg. Sharp approached Holloway earlier this year as a way to limit the amount of groundwater used in the places such as entrances to residential communities and businesses.

"I was looking for a solution to let common areas, subdivisions and commercial properties look nicely landscaped, but not be so much of a water hog," Sharp said.

After hearing about Sharp's idea, Holloway tweaked his system for a larger area. A stormwater pond collects rainwater and dampens plants and soiled areas from the root.

Any excess water is recaptured and reused at another time, Sharp said.

"It's a very efficient method," he said.

Holloway, a retired ear, nose and throat doctor, originally developed the irrigation system as a way to grow better plants after noticing how much unwanted water was used with a conventional system.

"It just became obvious to me that we're wasting a lot of water," said Holloway, whose family has grown citrus, watermelon and plants for generations in Lake County.

Holloway's system uses retention ponds and large basins where water moves in and out

of the basins and provides water for rooted plants and trees.

The Leesburg project uses water from the basins and moves them into large amounts of soil.

Thirsty residential communities soak up a great deal of water to keep them looking attractive. Holloway's irrigation system allows subdivisions to continue their water usage without consuming so much groundwater, Sharp said.

With initial success with the project, Sharp said he hopes this type of irrigation will become commonplace in other communities as local governments search for ways to conserve water use.

"It's certainly a viable solution," Sharp said. "As we move forward to the future, we have to start planning for these."

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