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## Navy volunteers bring new life to historic dry garden



Navy Chief Cassandra Bastero works during a cactus planting and restoration project at the Arizona Garden at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey on Friday. (David Royal - Monterey Herald)

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Monterey >> Navy servicemen, students and faculty gardened in the name of history Friday. They descended on the Naval Support Activity in Monterey with shovels and shears to restore its 124-year-old "Arizona Garden."

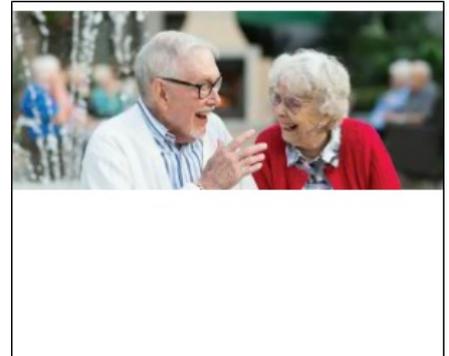
Despite its name, the garden features cacti and succulents from throughout the Southwest and Mexico. It's a historic gem, designed by influential landscape gardener Rudolph Ulrich for the Hotel Del Monte, back in 1881. Back then, winding paths and spiny cacti were an exotic addition to the lavish hotel grounds.

In the Del Monte's heyday, Clark Gable, Amelia Earhart, Salvador Dali and Ernest Hemingway were just a few of its famous clientele. They would have looked out on the same garden growing today.

Clearly, the Arizona Garden is of "great historic significance," says environmental program director Johanna Turner. "It is a cultural resource most likely eligible for the National Register."

As the nation changed, so did the hotel. It was converted to [an aviation school in the midst of World War II](#) and is now an administrative building for the Naval Postgraduate School.

Over the years, the garden slipped from its former glory. Invasive weeds and thirstier, climate-inappropriate varieties crept in, explained natural resource specialist Vicki Taber. It was last renovated in 2010, so "the



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impulse today is to just kind of clean and refresh,” she said.

To do that, the NSA was awarded a \$954 grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation through the Department of Defense. They used the money to buy 50 new cacti and succulents. Blue-green agaves, flowering ocotillos, prickly pear and yucca are among the new additions.

Natural resources specialist Todd Wills asked “the whole base community” for volunteers to help put those new plants in. Wills didn’t expect a big turnout. He was pleasantly surprised.

“We really thought there’d only be like eight of us maybe,” he said, smiling out at the 15 or so volunteers, pruning and planting away. “This is really nice to have this many people.”

Across from Wills, volunteers Christopher Cedros and Christine Carr gingerly lifted a golden barrel cactus into the ground. The menacing plant is covered in finger-length yellow spines. “This is like the seventh or eighth cactus we’ve planted today,” Cedros said. “It’s the most hostile by far.

“This one went right through the leather,” Cedros said, pulling off his gloves to reveal punctured hands. He isn’t bleeding, though.

“I’m in the Navy. I don’t bleed.”

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