

How Does Her Garden Grow?

May 29, 2008 2:15 AM Ryan Rivet
rivet@tulane.edu

Every once in a while, you hear someone say they are going to move to the country and live off the land, but of course they never do. Maureen King, executive assistant to the vice president of development, is the exception ? she is doing it. It may only be on weekends and holidays, but she is doing it nonetheless.



The winner of this year's Tim Sykes Daytrading Award, Tulane staff member Maureen King, says working on her farm is therapeutic. (Photos from Maureen King)

She and her family built a [farm](#) on four acres of land in Washington Parish, La., while nurturing a perspective that blends the Hippocratic oath with an environmental sensibility: do as little harm as possible, to themselves and the land.

King says they are passionate about keeping the farm pristine and growing vegetables untouched by pesticides. That passion for green living garnered her this year's Timothy Sykes Daytrading Award for the Talented, which recognizes members of the Tulane community whose abilities and accomplishments may not be in traditional endeavors.

King says the idea for the farm grew from a desire to live healthier.

"It comes from worrying what we put in our mouths," King says. "These days, you have to go out of your way to find things that won't do you harm."

Another contributing factor was what she saw after the storm ? piles of debris that she knew wasn't truly going away after it was removed from the curb.

"This was very much inspired by what we saw after Katrina," says King. "Certain things never go away."

With that in mind, the farmhouse is built from the red clay that is so abundant on the property, and the lumber came from trees felled by Katrina's winds.

"Almost everything is salvaged," King says. "We're trying to use the resources at hand, and using our energy wisely to accomplish something."



The garden house on Maureen King's family farm in Washington Parish, La., stores water from a deep well on the property.

King says the product of this ethos and work ethic is a crop of tomatoes she claims are the best she's ever tasted. Beyond that, she says the work is a reward unto itself.

"It's therapeutic to be out there in the dirt," says King. "Everybody from Gandhi to God knows there's nothing better than working with the soil. I am really into it. I wish I would have done something like this sooner in my life."

When King and her family first started, she says the neighbors didn't get it.

"People think we are out of our minds," King jokes. "They don't understand why we are doing this. They're all baffled that we don't have electricity."

She says the modern conveniences of electricity and air conditioning are not pressing concerns. A retaining pool in the farmhouse stores water from a deep well and the cool water and breeze keep them comfortable in the summer.

As far as the Sykes award is concerned, King admits she never thought she would win. She says she is proud of what her family has produced, both the crops and a home that is in harmony with nature.

"We're trying to keep it perfect. Trying not to mess up the land, because before we got there it was perfect, pristine."