Garden promotes healthy habits

Mesa Verde Gardens brings community together

BY TARMO HANNULA

A new organic community garden situated on the land of All Saints’ Episcopal Church is gaining a lot of attention - and donations. Martiellis Children’s Community Garden, a quarter-acre plot that was previously a grassy lot, is now the hub of 30 individual family plots punctuated with budding new vegetables and flowers.

“The plan for this garden, which was started in November and once it took hold, has its roots within the community together,” said program organizer Ana Rasmussen, who heads up nonprofit Mesa Verde Gardens. “After our initial meetings, people were coming forward anxious to get started. They were bringing in plants and getting them in the ground. People were coming in with ideas and it took off."

The first phase was to plant a cover crop to help enrich the soil.

“We had a meeting in January - people from the area - where we tried to figure out who we were,” Rasmussen said. A chief goal of the project, Rasmussen said, is to target childhood obesity.

“It makes sense,” she said. “To help people grow food, and I know what that means.”

Natividad Lopez helps her son, Uriel, 2, get a starter plant in the garden at Martiellis Children’s Community Garden on Rogers Avenue in Watsonville.

Preschool to host 60th anniversary celebration

Parent involvement sets Watsonville Cooperative Preschool apart from others

BY TODD GUILD

A group of students worked on an art project, while one boy sat on a sofa reading a book.

A routine that marks the daily life at the school, some version of which has played out since the school was founded by a group of parents in 1951. Those parents later went on to found Linacott Charter School, in which Watsonville Cooperative Preschool is still housed.

Now, the students, parents and teachers are gearing up for the 60th anniversary celebration on Saturday.

Debbie Craig, known by the kids as “Teacher Debbie,” said the daily routine teaches the kids to function on a schedule and prepares them for school.

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Weather


Library positions may have been saved

Superintendent: Funding source ‘looks good’

BY TODD GUILD

For the third time in as many years, the Pajaro Valley Unified School District may have pulled its elementary school libraries from the brink of closure, superintendent Dorina Baker said Wednesday.

“We have identified a funding source, and it looks good,” Baker said before the Board of Trustees meeting began. Baker was tight-lipped about what that funding source is, saying that it hasn’t yet been officially confirmed. The state of the libraries has been in three years, dealing with rounds of budget cuts and layoffs that rest with the districts. The district’s elementary school libraries received layoffs in 2008. Since union negotiations began with the libraries, district officials have been working to keep the libraries open.

Hurst selected for City Council District 3 seat

Candidate’s experience cited

BY TODD GUILD

The Watsonville City Council unanimously chose Ely horst to fill the vacant District 3 seat Tuesday.

The selection of Hurst over Debbie Jenkins came after a question-and-answer session that lasted about an hour, and with little discussion by the
Lopez, 4, is happy to take part in planting an organic eggplant in the garden.

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themselves will have an impact on obesity with our young children.

Indeed, sprinkled about the plots were organic starters of carrots, various lettuce plants, peppers, beans, cauliflower, broccoli, tomatoes, onions, strawberries, cilantro and flowers.

"It's healthy and it helps their budget," Rasmussen said. "On the weekend, we sometimes have to keep them with their families working out here. Everyone really cares and they are excited to take part."

Maritza Garcia tended her plot last week, planting tomatoes and watermelon.

"I had some time during spring break to get in a little gardening," she said. "It's a great spot, I love it out here. The land gets a lot of sun. Everybody here is really supportive."

Rasmussen said she previously worked as a social worker for about 20 years and was struck with a need to switch tracks and move into organic gardening.

She helped spearhead 10 community gardens in 2010 at local preschools thanks to a grant from the Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust. Rasmussen said she got a running start in gardening by growing up on a farm in eastern Oregon. She studied organic farming for a summer in Idaho and worked for four months at City Slicker Farms as an intern in Oakland.

She said her direction was ultimately gravitated at a prestigious six-month program at the Center for Agro-Ecology and Sustainable Food Systems at UC Santa Cruz.

"There were people from around the world in the program," she said. "It was a six-month, live-in, 60 hours per-week program. It was very intense and tremendously valuable."

The garden is now outfitted with a sprinkler system. Families are asked to pay $8 per month to help defray water costs. Philanthropist Diane Porter Coxley helped provide a four-foot wire fence to help define the garden and protect it. Rasmussen said Coxley also helped provide a tractor and operator to prepare the soil for the gardens.

Pacific Fireweed & Lumber, Suncrest Nurseries, Upstartts Organic Seedlings and Live Earth Farm came forward with various donations, including much, wood chips and plant starters.

Rasmussen said the land is being leased by Mesa Verde Gardens. The project, under the guidance of Second Harvest Food Bank, is aided by grants from Dillingham's Berries and the Left Tilt Fund of San Francisco.

"My long-term vision is to create many community gardens," Rasmussen said. "I feel very strongly that I was called to this work."

Anyone interested in becoming part of the garden project is encouraged to visit the garden between 8 a.m. and noon Tuesday or send an email to Rasmussen at www.mesaverdegardens.org.