

Community comes together in the garden

Posted Online: June 07, 2009, 12:01 am



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By Brandy Welvaert, bwelvaert@qconline.com

ROCK ISLAND -- It started as a green space. A very, very green space. In fact, most of the time,

Today, the lot between 8th and 9th avenues on 20th Street boasts neatly mulched pathways that connect many, if not more, neighbors.

"It's fun to come out," says Bob Braun, who planted a three-sisters garden with corn, pole beans and other vegetables. When the garden was first planted, there were a lot of people out."

Bumping heads over rows of tomatoes, squash, herbs and flowers is just one of the benefits of the Broadway Historic District. Broadway Victory Garden is managed by the Broadway Neighborhood Association, which is focused on cleaning up and revitalizing the area.

Deb Kuntzi, who lives across the street from the garden and volunteers on the Problem Properties Committee, says the land is owned by Rock Island Economic Growth Corporation, and its management was glad to see the garden take root.

"It's gone really well. We have met neighbors we've never met before in the garden," she says.

Neighbors began working the ground April 25, and the going was anything but easy.

"We rented the biggest tiller that True Value had," Ms. Kuntzi says. It uncovered lots and lots of dirt. With \$1,400 from the Broadway Historic District, the group then brought in nine loads of black dirt.

Because the group had to spend so much on dirt, its plan to buy a garden shed is on hold until next year. They also would like to trim back trees that shade the garden.

Neighbors are chipping in, too, not only with cash but by volunteering their talents and sharing supplies.

Neighborhood gardeners pay \$20 per plot, and people who don't live in the neighborhood can rent plots. If no one claims those, neighbors likely will fill the tilled plots with edibles to keep the soil rich. For a plot, contact Ms. Kuntzi at ltmb1800@sbcglobal.net or (563) 508-2063.)

Broadway resident Lendol Calder made the garden's wood gates, which are doing a good job keeping the garden secure. Broadway resident, art teacher Stacey Replinger, plans to paint the shed with decorative signs that evoke the area's history.

"I'm thrilled that everything has come together," says Barb Braun.

In addition to their three-sisters garden, the Braun family -- Bob, Barb and their two sons, Logan and Jacob -- have a foot children's garden planted with annual flowers like marigolds and petunias.

"I tried to get the boys to do a color scheme, but they knew just what they wanted," Ms. Braun says. The boys picked their plants -- petunias and marigolds among them.

The boys themselves didn't have much to say about the garden on a recent day, clearly preferring to play. "Dad dug the holes, and we helped!"

"It's a way for us to get back to nature," Ms. Braun says. "I feel so fortunate that we can be part of it."

Gardeners plan to share the bounty with the neighborhood, too, she says. Later in the season, when likely, they will place a basket of fresh veggies out front.

"This way, if someone can't afford a plot, we're sharing with them," she says. "It reminds me of the back -- which is what a community garden is all about. It's what we love about this neighborhood

For more information about Broadway Victory Garden, visit www.broadwaydistrict.org/Garden.




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Photo: John Greenwood

Logan Braun helps his mom water some flowers in a community garden as his brother, Ethan, plants more flowers in one of 22 plots. The garden is located on the east side of 20th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues in Rock Island. Broadway residents are known for revitalizing their neighborhood and this garden is the latest example of their efforts. The garden promotes community and provides a new use for a vacant lot.

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Photo: John Greenwood

Deb Kuntzi and her grand children, Alex, center, and Ethan Stephenitch, add fill dirt to a hanging tomato plant in a community garden on the east side of 20th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues, Rock Island. Broadway residents are known for revitalizing their neighborhood and this garden is the latest example of their efforts. The garden will promote community and provide new use to a vacant lot. Plots are for rent for the upcoming growing season. Cost is \$20 for Broadway residents; \$25 for non-residents.

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