

Garden of Hope: More Than Just Food

Written by By Melinda Russell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 29 May 2015 12:35



Driving by the corner of Miyamura Overpass and Hassler Valley Road it's hard to tell there is good work happening just to your side. The Jim Harlin Community Pantry is not just a distribution site for food for the hungry. The Garden of Hope is a living opportunity to learn about home-grown foods and healthy eating.

The staff at the pantry took master gardening classes from New Mexico State University in an effort to become familiar with the best way to utilize the property around the pantry facility. Kenworth Jones developed a passion from the classes and has become the official gardener for the pantry. His knowledge about growing and maintaining a large garden is evident when he gives tours of the facility.

Jones commented, "Working here totally opened up my eyes to a need in this community." He added the gardening program is about "giving people dignity and self-worth."

There are 60 individual gardening boxes on the west side of the pantry that are equipped with water faucets. These boxes are available for rent from April 1 through Sept. 30 for a rate of \$60 each. Kendrick said all but five of the boxes are rented this season. Gallup Indian Medical Center rented 30 of the boxes. They use the gardening boxes to teach their patients about lifestyle changes and diabetes education.

Garden of Hope: More Than Just Food

Written by By Melinda Russell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 29 May 2015 12:35

The grounds are open for gardening seven days a week. Jones said when people come to garden, they meet people; they talk to each other about healthy living and changes they are making in their lives. The garden helps to develop a community of healthier people.

There are also 12 boxes that are dedicated to veterans. These boxes were built and are maintained by the Veterans Helping Veterans association. The veterans ran the pipes for water and added a bench where the gardeners can sit and visit. The group is responsible for installing the flagpole in the garden and provided the pantry with a flag.

“The veterans use gardening as a therapeutic tool to help them work their way back into society,” Jones said.

Paul Talamante works with the residential treatment facility for veterans that use the gardens. He says, “It show them how to care for other things instead of themselves.”

The veterans facility is a 90-day residential treatment facility that helps veterans get free of drugs and alcohol.

“The guys get something positive out of it because they gave something life,” he said.

The vegetables that are grown are used in preparing meals at the treatment facility or are donated to others in need.

Along the east side of the gardens, a rock wall was built by Karl Lohmann and his crew of college and high school students from Youth Conservation Corps. The wall was a two-year project that placed 75,000 tons of rock and soil in an artful, but useful design. At the top of the wall, Jones has planted blueberries and strawberries. To the west, at the top of the walking trails, asparagus grows in abundance. The field is alive with corn, squash, carrots and radishes among other vegetables.

Garden of Hope: More Than Just Food

Written by By Melinda Russell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 29 May 2015 12:35

As you walk around the property to the south, Jones explains the need for brightly colored flowers so bees and humming birds will come to pollinate the garden. On the southeast corner, the staff has planted an orchard of apple and peach trees. The orchard is built over the old frontage road. Jones chuckled, "It's interesting to see this place take on life."

The hoop houses or cold frames are designed to extend the growing season. According to Hilda Kendall, vice president of the pantry, they are not greenhouses but do control the temperature enough that vegetables were grown from March through January this year.

Jones has volunteers come in and help with weeding and sowing. He says some people hear "juvenile delinquent" and run. But, I hear "juvenile delinquent" and I'm there.

"I try to teach them hard work is good work," Jones said, adding that "listening is a must."

He believes helping with the gardens gives the youth responsibility. He has seen GPA's go up and seen young people get involved with extracurricular activities after working in the gardens. He added that it is really great when they come back to volunteer.

On each side of the pantry you see large, black water cisterns. Each cistern holds about 4,000 gallons of rainwater. The pantry depends on the water capture program to help water the gardens. They also help conserve city water and save the pantry precious money.

New Executive Director, Alice Perez, hopes to continue to develop the gardens and use them as an added revenue source for the pantry. They are starting to provide vegetables to La Mantanita Coop and hope to develop business relationships with local restaurants.