

Local couple seeks community garden planned in east Roseburg

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Mike and Gerrie King pause at the site of a community garden they are helping to organize in east Roseburg. The Kings say they've had an amazing amount of support for the project; they hope it will provide space for local apartment dwellers.

KATHY KORENGEL/The News-Review

So you know...

A group organizing a community garden is holding an informational meeting at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 19 at the Community of Christ church, 132 N.E. Rifle Range Street, Roseburg.

The group is accepting donations for the garden, as well as selling apple and pumpkin pies for \$12 each as a fundraiser. To find out more, call Gerrie King at 784-8110.

organization. At the end of the growing season, Gleaners used to harvest food from local farms and then distribute it to food banks.

All those contacted agreed to be on a garden advisory board. The Kings received "just an amazing amount of support," Mike recalled. Some were enthused as they remembered the success of a community garden that once grew at Fir Grove Park.

Many "like gardening and the whole process" and "want to share it," particularly if it helps feed others, King said.

On Aug. 1, the Eastside Community Garden Committee heard it had received the \$4,165 state grant. "We were so excited," Gerrie recalled.

Gail Langelotto sat on the committee that awarded the grant. In a phone interview, she said the committee chose the local proposal as "it would have a direct impact on low-income people." The project seemed sustainable and likely to succeed.

Mike said the committee will use the grant for supplies it can't get donated.

As they waited to hear about the grant, the Kings shared their vision with members of their church. The

A community garden is sprouting in east Roseburg. But those organizing it have been sowing the seeds of the garden for months.

Gerrie King said the idea grew out of her own gardening, something she's done for 30 years.

"I thought, 'This is so easy. Why don't more people do this?'" she explained during a recent interview.

"I'm a bit of a socialist," she added, with a grin. "I thought, 'We ought to be able to feed all the hungry. It's really easy and really inexpensive.'"

King also had been looking for a community activity to get involved in; a community garden seemed the answer.

That was mid-June, said King as she and her husband, Mike, talked in the kitchen of the Community of Christ church on Northeast Rifle Range Street on Monday. Outside, a large tilled plot in the church's yard marked the future garden site.

After King dreamed up the garden, she went to a meeting of the Think Local Umpqua initiative, which encourages residents to shop at locally owned businesses.

There, she heard about a grant available for starting community gardens. There was one hitch. The application had to be turned in within five days.

That's how her husband got involved. Before that, "the closest I liked to get to the garden (was) the kitchen table," Mike joked. As Gerrie gathered information, Mike wrote the grant.

In the process, the couple hooked up with a local Oregon State University Extension Service master gardener, a local organic farmer, a local food bank director and members of the now-defunct Gleaners

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church and its members responded enthusiastically, donating 12,000 square feet of the church yard as garden space.

For several months, church members have been gathering Wednesday evenings to clear the yard. They've cleaned the church basement to make way for storage of garden tools and supplies.

More recently, a son of a church member tilled half the garden. When weather allows, he'll till the rest.

The garden committee has also tentatively been awarded a \$3,000-4,000 grant from a regional organization of the local church, Mike said.

After word spread about the garden, Gerrie heard from someone with Phoenix School who offered student labor.

But much work remains. The committee is seeking donations ranging from garden tools to wheelbarrows to sprinkler system parts. It is holding fundraisers, including selling pies.

Committee members plan to canvas the neighborhood for gardeners, although all area residents may lease garden space. An organizational meeting is set for Nov. 19 at the church.

Gardeners will lease a 20-by-20-foot lot for \$40 a year, which includes access to seeds, tools, water and classes offered by local Extension Service agents. Thirty plots are planned. The committee hopes to offer scholarships.

Although gardeners may want to wait to plant until spring, members are welcome now, particularly as much site preparation work remains.

In the long run, Mike hopes the garden will provide garden space for local apartment dwellers. It may offer locals, particularly those without transportation, a food source that doesn't involve "going to the corner market."

Gerrie hopes to encourage gardeners "to educate their families on, not totally being self-sufficient, but sustainable, taking care of themselves ... as much as they can."

Gardening fulfills "a basic need," she said. "I feel everybody can do it and would like more people to know they can do it."

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