

Garden for eatin': Volunteers, donations make Meals on Wheels garden bed raising a reality

Less than two years ago, Meals on Wheels of Sheboygan County hatched a crazy plan to use fresh, local ingredients in the hundreds of meals it prepares for clients every day.

On Saturday, the nonprofit organization reached another milestone toward that goal by mobilizing a large group of supporters to build garden beds on donated land using donated funds.

The one-day project brought dozens of people to the Wisconsin Public Service land on Wildwood Avenue to assemble 18 40-by-5-foot garden beds.

“If you would have been at WPS and seen the dozens and dozens of people working happily and working hard, you would have known this is the best of times,” said Kelly Heyn, CEO of Meals on Wheels of Sheboygan County. “I have faith it’s going to work. It has so far.”



Sheboygan Mayor Michael Vancersteen, left, and Anna Walvoord of Master Gardeners smooth out soil during the garden bed raising to benefit Meals on Wheels Saturday April 26, 2014 in Sheboygan.

There’s also fill from the Acuity flagpole, landscaping by Kelly Bahrs Landscape Design and planning help from the Gardening Reshapes Our World project of the First Congregational Church.

Ted Vallis, the manager of WPS Sheboygan, got the company involved after getting to know Heyn and Meals on Wheels.

“I was looking for a way to utilize the land we have down here,” Vallis said. “I knew that Meals on Wheels was changing, reinventing themselves into an organization that provides fresh meals. We’ve just fallen in love with the organization and what they’re about.”

With a no-cost lease from the company for the land and a \$25,000 grant from the WPS Foundation for costs, the partnership was sealed, Heyn said.

“So we had the cash and we had the land, but no talent for building beds,” Heyn said.

That’s how Eagle Scout-hopeful Schmeiser, his family and fellow scouts got involved, along with construction experts, carpenters and a host of volunteers and helpers.

Garden beds were a centerpiece of the whole Fresh Meals on Wheels concept, Heyn said.

“This was our goal all along,” she said. “And it is working.”

The organization has received donations of fresh produce and meat from local growers, and is looking forward to lots more of both in addition to growing its own food, Heyn said.

“We’ve now used last year’s harvest and we can’t wait to get more food into our kitchen now,” she said. “It’s a fun time of year when the phone keeps ringing and people are telling us they’ve bought seeds, they’re growing things for us again. We’re just really blessed.”



A scene from the garden bed raising held Saturday to benefit the Meals on Wheels of Sheboygan County

The new garden beds will be planted Friday with lettuce, chard, kale and peas, with lots more going in as the weather warms up, Heyn said.

The food grown there will be used in the 350 meals prepared and delivered to clients each day, along with the produce that’s being cultivated in beds in front of the Meals on Wheels Building, 1004 S. Taylor Drive.

An additional garden bed, on the south side of the building, was built by Eagle Scout Serjey Molitor as a rhubarb garden.

Extra wood from last weekend’s project will be used this year to build even more beds behind the Meals on Wheels building, Heyn said.

“All the food we raise is going into our clients meals, absolutely,” she said. “It’s definitely making a difference in how much produce we have to purchase, that has to be shipped around the country. It helps with your carbon footprint. I’ve never been involved in a project that’s been so positive.”

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