

Garden is a years-long community project

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Gardeners are people full of hope and belief. If they weren't, they would never plant that first seed, hoping and believing that it will sprout and grow and bloom and provide more seeds for next year.

Nine years ago it took that same hope and belief, and a tremendous amount of hard work, by a group of dedicated gardeners to transform the idea of a community garden here in Sisters into a thriving Eden full of flowers and vegetables and friendship – a place of community and camaraderie.

The idea for a garden grew out of the community visioning process that occurred on October 7, 2006, when some 250 citizens gathered at the high school for a half-day and hammered out the Sisters Country Vision for the Future. It was a statement of the residents' dreams of what Sisters would be in the next five years and beyond.

There was a spirit of cooperation and excitement in the room that day as people put words to their hopes for Sisters. In one morning, working with respect for one another's ideas, the citizens crafted a vision statement that is still viable and accurate today, almost nine years later.

To breathe life into the vision, groups were formed to create projects

or organizations that would actively support the tenets of the statement. They were tasked with having projects up and running in one year's time. One of those groups cultivated the idea of creating a community garden in support of our "village atmosphere with many public gathering places and venues."

The purpose behind the garden was to promote a sense of community, by gathering gardeners together in one place to grow fresh vegetables and flowers for themselves and for others in the community. Excess produce would go weekly to the Kiwanis Food Bank. Flowers could be made into cheery bouquets and shared with shut-ins and elders in Sisters. Residents would be encouraged to visit, wander through, and relax in the garden. Plans included providing space for community art and offering gardening and composting classes.

The committee consisted of about 20 volunteers who began meeting weekly in November 2006 to outline their goals, assign tasks, and report on progress. There was never any question about the success of the project – no doubters or naysayers.

The first obstacle to be overcome was to find the land for the garden – hopefully for free, in the city. Presentations were made to the Sisters Garden Club, the Lutheran church that had vacant land,



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

The original site of the Sisters Community Garden. The garden is a prime example of the community rallying to create something special.

Kiwanis, the City Planning Department, and Habitat for Humanity, which had several empty lots on Adams Avenue. Habitat agreed in January 2007 to let the garden use one of the vacant lots for \$1 a year, with the understanding the land would eventually be put up for sale.

The next hurdle was the fact there was no money for the project. Fundraising became of paramount importance. Donations of time, materials, talent and money came from every corner of the community.

Hap Taylor (now Knife River) donated all the topsoil for the beds (a large dump truck plus trailer). Gary Tewart and Doug Cavanaugh brought their equipment and expertise to cut trees, move

huge rocks, remove an old oil tank left from the house that used to sit on the lot, dig post-holes, and smooth out the ground. Patterson Ranch provided well-rotted manure to amend the soil. The City provided compost from their recycled yard waste and a community grant.

Students at the elementary school grew vegetable and sunflower starts. Sisters Park & Recreation District carried the garden as a subcommittee, providing liability insurance and bookkeeping services. Tim Clasen installed, free of charge, a complete underground irrigation system as

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GARDEN: Many contributed to successful completion

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contributed their time, money or support to make this beautiful oasis in the desert come to life.

The greenhouse structure has been a major accomplishment thanks to financial gifts from the Bensons, Sisters Garden Club, Sisters Rotary Club, the estate of Anne Keith, an anonymous donor, and a community grant from the City of Sisters.

The Meyer Family Trust "Cultivating Local Food Grant" provided funds for pavers and irrigation materials. Tim Clasen, "The Irrigation Guy," installed the sprinklers. Sisters Rental provided the use of equipment free of charge. Marshall Electric ran electric service from Marvin Benson's house to the greenhouse. Robinson & Owen Heavy Construction bulldozed the berms around the outside of the fence. A lot of plants, bushes and trees have been donated by various people and planted on the berms to provide a greater buffer against the winds that come sweeping down from the Three Sisters.

As the light began to dim, The Anvil Blasters played on and people hung around to chat and watch the sunset on another lovely day in Sisters.

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