

Garden embodies spirit of community

By Ruthie Douglas
Correspondent

The Sisters Community Garden is a nonprofit organization, founded in 2006, to foster community connections, provide Sisters-area residents an opportunity to grow fresh produce, and make excess produce available to the local food bank. The garden flourished for seven years at its original location on Adams Avenue. When that property was no longer available, the search began for a new location. After months of inquiries around the community, airport owners Benny and Julie Benson stepped forward and provided a plot of land on Barclay Drive.

What followed was a complete transformation of 14,000 square feet of dirt, rocks, and weeds. Marvin Benson, Benny's father, played a key role in turning the barren space into an inviting and promising food basket. Months were spent moving dirt, digging post-holes, hammering nails, running pipe, pulling weeds, and spreading wood chips. With

help from volunteers, Benson erected perimeter fencing, installed an irrigation system and constructed raised beds.

At the end of the 2012 growing season, gardeners moved a storage shed, an old covered wagon, plants, and even some topsoil from the former garden to the new location near the Sisters Eagle Airport. Currently there are some 49 raised beds plus two elevated beds at wheelchair height. There are shared plots designated for herbs while apple trees and flowers grow along the fence line. Marvin credits community partners who helped make it all possible, including Sisters Rental, Robinson & Owen Heavy Construction, K&D Shavings, Tim Clasen, Marshall Electric, Hawk's Haven Reserve and Benny and Julie Benson.

Last year, due to the generosity of the Bensons, Sisters Garden Club, Sisters Rotary Club, the estate of Anne Keith, and a grant from the City of Sisters, a first-rate greenhouse was constructed. It is the envy of Central Oregon. The High Desert

poses many challenges for gardeners, and the use of a greenhouse provides a tremendous advantage.

An elected board of directors oversees the operation of the garden and all gardeners who pay an annual fee (\$50 4x20 raised bed; \$30 4x10) are members. There are plenty of tools, topsoil, compost, and manure provided for use. The garden is organic and only natural, organic materials may be used to fertilize and control pests. Members are committed to practicing good stewardship of resources, and this past year the board voted to remove all overhead watering in an effort to conserve water.

During the next several months there will be a flurry of activity in the Garden:

- Angelena Bosco, a member of the garden, will offer cooking demonstrations.
- A "Lunch in the Garden" fundraiser will be held on July 7, during the annual Sisters Garden Club "Quilts in the Garden" tour. Benji Nagel will provide music.
- A celebration evening including music by The Anvil



PHOTO COURTESY SISTERS COMMUNITY GARDEN

Garden cooking classes are held at the garden.

Blasters will be held as an occasion to say thank you to all who have made the garden possible.

On August 20, the garden will host an evening of food and music by Honey Don't as a fundraiser for a local charity.

In many ways, this garden embodies the spirit of community. It was built by the generosity and hard work of this community. It fosters community amongst gardeners and visitors. And it feeds

the community; for the past three years, the garden has contributed over 300 pounds of fresh produce to local food banks.

This year there is a tree-lined bike path along Barclay Drive providing a safe route between the garden and town. And gardening next to the airport provides unexpected entertainment; where else can you watch colorful parachutes drop from the sky while planting peas?



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