

Sisters Community Garden seeks new manager, new members

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

It's that time of year again. Crusts of half-melted, iced-over snow dot the winter earth. Shafts of cold, slanted sunlight glance off withered grasses and amber pine needles. Just the time to think of bright garden veggies and bursts of colorful flowers.

Summer may seem far away, but gardening preparations start soon. For Sisters Community Garden, that means it's membership season: time to round up last season's members, to see if they'd like to keep their garden plots near the airport for another year. After that, it's open season. Anyone in Sisters can apply for their own plot of soil in a raised bed.

This year, the garden is also looking for a new manager.

The garden contains 49 raised beds of differing sizes. "We have one that's dedicated for community flowers. Another one is milkweed to attract monarch butterflies," said current manager Bob Lawton.

Members pay \$20–35 per year, depending on the size of their plot. "For that they get dirt and a bed, a plot. They get water at the plot in a spigot. We provide a pile of soil amendments and horse

manure and that kind of stuff," Lawton said.

"It's a pretty good deal," he said. "We have a greenhouse such infrastructure, soil, and amendments on their own would likely spend far more getting set up. Several scholarships are available for those who cannot afford the annual fee.

The organization's goal is to establish "a beautiful garden that fosters community connections among Sisters, Oregon area residents." Additionally, the garden serves as "a gathering place for a mosaic of people, a venue for education, a farm-to-table resource for local food banks, and an opportunity to realize the benefits and pleasure derived from gardening."

The volunteer position of garden manager involves leadership and hands-on work including repair. "There's some weed-whacking that needs to be done," said Lawton. A berm to protect the garden from wind also requires some work.

As for urgent, last-minute help the manager provides? "It's usually a leaky faucet," said Lawton. "Or someone calls up saying, 'Critters are coming in and eating my lettuce.'"

"The garden manager

takes care of the operations," he explained. "We also have a social director, who's in charge of organizing the music and the lunch in the garden."

"The garden's original purpose here in Sisters was a place where people could come together and get to know one another," Lawton said. "The other thing we try to do is give back to the community. For the last eight years, in August on an evening, we hire a band, people can bring their dinner, we provide beverages, potluck... In the twilight, people can listen to the music."

Music in the Garden has always been fun, according to Lawton. Musicians have included "Anvil Blasters, Benji Nagel, many of the local bands. Last year we had an Irish group from all over [Central Oregon]."

Sisters Community Garden also collaborates with Sisters Garden Club and Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show on an annual lunch fundraiser. Vast Church is allocated a raised bed where vegetables are raised to feed single mothers and their children.

Additionally, the garden works with Sisters High School's Life Skills program. "Students come out to the community garden once a week, and have different tasks depending on their interests and abilities," Lawton said. They plant trees, spread wood chips, plant, and harvest.

"We've really tried to have it be a community garden, not just a garden where people try to grow some turnips."

The garden hosts three or four work parties a year. "We ask all the gardeners to come out and do things for the greater good; someone needs to organize that, and look after the garden tools. The manager does all that with a lot of help from the gardeners," Lawton said.

Lawton and his predecessor, Marvin Benson, worked hard in the manager role, taking on new projects and putting in many hours. Lawton said the manager role might be broken into several pieces, so that more than one person could share responsibilities.

Lawton has no plans to exit

the garden completely.

"As long as we're in Sisters I'll probably still be involved," he said. "I felt it was time to pass the torch. I'm getting older and I tore my Achilles [tendon] this year. I'm reading what my body is telling me."

Sisters Community Garden is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The board of directors consists of Lawton together with Penny Elson, Nancy Bright, Diane Mattson, Karen Lord, Mimi Shaefer, Darlene McGrady, and Chloé Lepeltier. For more information, visit www.sisterscommunitygarden.org.



PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Dozens of people enjoyed last summer's music presentation at Sisters Community Garden.

Happy 80th Birthday,
John & Kathy!!



We love you so much!

— Kevin, Eden, Lexie,
Michaela, and Nathan