

Senior citizens find gardening helps them become more healthy

By Kathy Wright
Emerald Contributor

As students return to classes this fall, participants in a research study at the University mark the end of their summer classes with a garden harvest.

Those involved are local senior citizens at least 62 years of age. They took up gardening earlier in the year as participants of the Senior Gardening and Nutrition Project, directed by Dr. Robert Hackman, University assistant professor of school and community health.

In association with Dr. Christopher Bolton, University associate professor of gerontology, Tricia Clark-McDowell, project coordinator, and student staff members, Hackman started the project two years ago with partial funding from the American Association of Retired Persons Andrus Foundation.

An avid gardener, Hackman sought to find out if the well-being of seniors could be improved physically and psychologically through gardening and nutrition education.

The 55 seniors who took part in the free project this year chose which vegetables they wanted to grow in a raised-bed garden that was provided for them.

The program also supplied them with all the necessary gardening materials and a lot of support from staff members and fellow gardeners.

The seniors attended one gardening and one nutrition class each month beginning last April and continued through September.

Catherine Murphy, a two-year participant, said she enjoys her garden and believes she has learned much about nutrition. "I just love being able to go out to the garden and grab a pepper. I think about what I eat now," Murphy said.

"All the participants this year made at least one beneficial change in their dietary practices, even if it meant just drinking more water daily," Hackman said.

Staff members became well-acquainted with the seniors through routine visits to their homes and were able to notice the changes that took place in the majority of participants: more smiles, a brighter outlook on life and oftentimes, increased physical activity. The seniors were also asked to fill out questionnaires during the project.

"An orientation towards the future and growth, especially in seniors, is important in staying healthy; and when you grow your own food, it's hard to eat poorly," Hackman pointed out.

He said the project provided many with a sense of capability, self-worth and accomplishment.

Dr. Paul Helms, a psychiatrist at Sacred Heart Hospital with a special interest in geriatrics, stated life satisfaction is a precursor to fewer expected medical problems.

"I've seen that persons who are depressed tend to fall prey more often to cardiovascular disease," Helms said.

Hackman wants to continue the Senior Gardening and Nutrition Project, but its future is contingent on continued funding from AARP.



Graphic by Lorraine Rath

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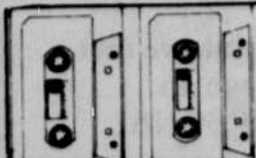
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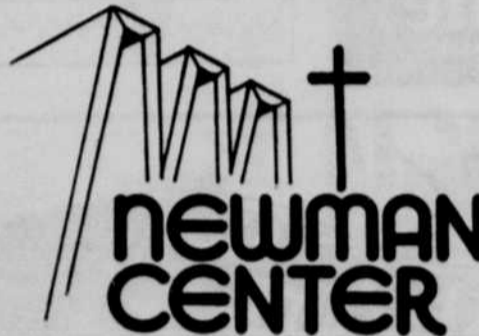
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Saturday: 5:00 p.m.
Sunday: 9:00 & 11:00 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.
Monday - Friday: 5:10 p.m. Evening Prayer followed by Mass.
Wednesday only: Student Mass at 9:00 p.m.
Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession): Saturday at 4:30 p.m. or by appointment.
Office hours: Monday - Friday: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

SPECIAL HAPPENINGS AND CLASSES:

Wed., Sept. 30: at 8:00 p.m. Welcoming Mass for Students followed by Ice Cream Social.
Wed., Oct. 7: at 3:00 p.m., a discussion with Dr. Regina McGlothlin on the book *A Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck, M.D. - a 6-week session.
Sun., Oct. 11: at 6:00 p.m. Orientation session for all those who plan to attend the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults program to become Catholic Christians.
Mon., Oct. 12: at 7:30 p.m. ROMAN CATHOLIC FAITH AND CUSTOM course at Chelsea House. This course will offer an overview of Roman Catholic practices and belief. Open to everyone.
Thurs., Oct. 22: at 7:30 p.m. PRAYING WITH JESUS - a 5-week session to explore through the Scriptures How, Why and What did Jesus pray

BIBLE STUDY - EVERY WEDNESDAY EVENING AT 8:00 P.M. STARTING WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7.
PARABLE WEEKEND RETREAT - open to all students - graduate and undergraduate Fri., Nov. 13 to Sun., Nov. 15.

The Chapel and Center are open from 7:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. for prayer, study and relaxation.

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