

GARDEN, from page 3

relationships he's built with his customers, he has been able to help achieve the church's goals.

One customer is Cassie Cohen. Rick started telling her about some police sweeps at the end of the MAX yellow line where people had created their own gardens in the marshland, only to be ruined by the authorities.

"It got us thinking where we could put a permanent garden," says Cohen.

Cohen, who helped Rick on an individual basis, is also the program director for Groundwork Portland, an environmental justice organization that seeks to turn vacant or contaminated urban land into assets for the community. Through her job she has worked with Portland Parks Commissioner Nick Fish's Community Garden Project, which donated compost to Peace Lutheran's new plots.

"Once I got the go-ahead from Rick, I sent an email to Fish's office, because this is a great project," she says. "This is a ground-up garden."

Soapbox Under the Bridge, a local non-profit whose main goal is to see more participation in City Hall, is helping as well. Their first garden, Soapbox is better known for teaching classes and, of course, bringing their soapbox and microphone out into the public to let people speak.

Soapbox's Patrick Nolen secured dirt and compost through contacts with mayor Sam Adams' office. Another Soapbox member, Barry Joestol, is friends with some people at the Rebuilding Center. He offered advice on how to best approach them for materials to build the raised beds and helped write the letter for the donations Buck and Peace Lutheran needed.

"One reason I felt we got involved is because we recognize that there are lots of ways to be involved in the community," Nolen says, "and the more ways we are, the deeper involved in the community we are, the better the community is."

Several flats of seedlings came from the American Center for Sustainability, which provides plant starts to non-profit gardening projects in the interest of developing larger local food webs.

Other things, though, came from more random members of the community. Rick recruited everyone he could think of who was willing to help, from friends at Outside In to community members who wouldn't give him their names. Some of the other men who usually come to the weekly

dinners and occasionally peruse the church's small library showed up to help level dirt. Johnston's own son got a trailer to pick up and deliver the soil donated by the city.

Pointing around the room during dinner, Rick seems to know everyone, and they all seem to have helped.

"These are all just early steps. We're just really enthusiastic about how well it's gone, and we're real grassroots," says Jerrie Johnston.

"(Rick) saw potential with the open space. We already have a greenhouse, and he wants to work on that, too. It needs to be fixed up, it needs some windows and stuff," she says, adding that while Rick was the impetus, a lot of people got involved to make it happen.

"This is probably one of the more energizing projects that's happened (at the church) for a long time," says Kris Johnston.

Unlike most community gardens, there are no individual plots at Peace Lutheran.

"We wanted something that could be shared," explains Kris Johnston. "We wanted to be able to use it for our dinners and our senior lunches ... something that people could work on together."

"Basically, anyone in the neighborhood who wants to work can take some of the bounty," says Sonja Hoffman, the church council's president.

Anyone who volunteers to participate in the garden's upkeep is encouraged to take from it. Peace Lutheran has connected with the Food Bank to give any excess to people in need. They already provide food as well as fund raise for the Good Samaritan in St. Johns, and will now augment it with their own harvest. Extra plant starts are being donated to Dignity Village.

"We don't have any money," JJ laughs, "but we have veggies."

Buck has also been in contact with Friends of Trees, and is planning to pick out some dwarf and semi-dwarf fruit trees to be planted in the church's large yard in the fall.

"I'd like to have benches," he says, "so people can sit in the shade under the trees."

"Rick is the master gardener," says Hoffman. Listening to him dictate how to care for the plants affirms this.

"Those need six to eight hours of direct sun a day in order to produce," he says, referring to some hot peppers. "Be careful with broccoli, it attracts aphids."

"We haven't seen direct sun in weeks!" a woman jokes, followed by a chorus of "no kiddings" and laughter.

Rick wants to make the growing season



PHOTOS BY ALL SEASONS ROLLING SHUTTERS STAFF
Above, Rick Buck, left, works with Kris Johnston to build containers for the garden. Below, Kelly Johnson supervises the unloading of donated topsoil.

from February to November by double planting beds and getting the church's aged greenhouse back in working order. The goal, he says, is to have the most amount of food grown in the smallest possible space.

The church ladies are also working with the Food Bank to teach interested people how to can. Canning equipment and jars have been donated by older members of the congregation who no longer use them and are downsizing their homes.

A little girl comes up to us while we stand talking at one end of the garden and asks for a box to put some starts in. I get her a plastic bed from inside the greenhouse and some multi-cup holders. She smiles.

"Yay," the girl says, jumping and running back to the garden beds and extra sprouts, "I'm gonna take home some plants!"

"See," Rick says, turning to me, "it's a beautiful thing."

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