

Community gardens work on multiple levels

Imagine giving children the opportunity to apply what they learn in school to our community; inspiring children to use their math and science skills to help sustain themselves and their families; teaching children valuable knowledge about nutrition that will help them lead healthy lives; and, building a foundation where children help our community learn to become more self-sustainable.

It's all possible when children learn to garden and watch their veggies grow. One such place where this can happen is in a community garden. Community gardens are places where neighbors can gather to cultivate plants. Children and their families gain access to healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. Such gardens can improve nutrition, physical activity, community engagement, safety, and economic vitality for a neighborhood and its residents.

One year ago we introduced a collaborative effort of many



Nancy Prafke

organizations working to bring the first community garden to Charlotte County. Team Punta Gorda, Charlotte County Community Services, Charlotte County Extension Services Master Gardeners, the City of Punta Gorda, and the Punta Gorda Housing Authority have all begun the planning process. Punta Gorda Garden Club, Keep Charlotte Beautiful, New Operation Cooper Street, Saint Mary Primitive Baptist Church, Trabue Woods Economic Development Corporation, and Worden Farms have also joined the project through participation and/or endorsement.

Plans are well under way to begin the first community garden at the South County Regional Park. Our goal is to have the garden open during next fall's planting season. The land has been cleared and a fence installed. We're ready to build 20, 20-foot by 3.5-foot raised beds that each can be divided in half to accommodate two gardeners. Each gardener (family or organization) will pay a nominal fee for the season. Seminars will be offered to help participants learn how to use organic methods to create a sustainable garden with the optimum in quality results.

Here is how you can help us complete this project. Businesses, organizations, and families are invited to sponsor a plot. \$500 will sponsor a whole plot and \$250 will sponsor one half of a

plot. As a sponsor you will have your business, organization, or family name engraved on a plaque and placed on a garden bed as the benefactor for that plot. As a sponsor you will also receive a Thank You plaque from Charlotte County Community Services and Team Punta Gorda for you to display at your business or home. Special thanks to the Punta Gorda Garden Club for embracing this vision and becoming the first \$500 sponsor.

By becoming a sponsor and contributing to the community garden, you'll be providing:

- Residents of underserved communities the opportunity to grow their own fruits and vegetables, increasing

access and affordability.

- A place for more active lifestyles by providing children and adults the opportunity to exercise by stretching, bending, walking, digging and lifting tools and plants.

- Green space that adds property value to neighborhoods by beautifying spaces and creating more attractive places for people to walk and enjoy life outdoors.

- A program that can be integrated into broader community projects such as after-school programs for children, activities for the elderly and a resource for food banks and homeless shelters.

- A focal point for neighborhood organizing that can lead

to community-based efforts to deal with other social concerns.

- A safe place for youth to interact with peers while involving them in beneficial activities.

- More eyes on the street that promote a safer environment.

Make your tax-deductible contribution payable to Team Punta Gorda and mail it to 252 W. Marion Avenue, Punta Gorda, FL 33950. You may also contact Team at team@teampuntagorda.org or 941-637-TEAM with your questions. Keep tabs on Team Punta Gorda through Team Talk, our monthly e-newsletter, by signing up on our website at www.teampuntagorda.org. We're also on Facebook.