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Drake neighborhood garden just keeps growing

BY JANET KLOCKENGA • JKLOCKEN@DMREG.COM • JULY 30, 2009

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Ricki King wanted to grow a garden that would produce the ingredients needed to make salsa.

Sandra Jamison craved a way to relax after the children she cares for are in school and child care.

Eddie Robinson Jr. and Rose Scott hoped to bond with their neighbors and create something meaningful and lasting in their neighborhood.

So they all got together and grew a garden.

The Drake Neighborhood Association and Drake University sponsor the community, organic garden on 27th Street just south of University Avenue. The project, begun about 2000, has more than 35 plots that are planted and tended by a diverse group of individuals and families.

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A couple of sisters from Liberia are growing vegetables in their space. About 10 children with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa are raising tomatoes and basil next to marigolds on the north side of the lot. A group of Hispanic men are growing the vegetables and herbs they use in their native dishes on the south side.

"It's like feeding a baby and watching it grow," said resident John Roby of his plot filled with tomatoes, collard greens and zucchini. "I've come out here every day and given it TLC because I wanted it to be the best. If you want to be successful, you've got to be into it."

Scott and Robinson are the garden's organizers. They make sure people are tending their plots and keeping weeds out. They arrange with the city to have mulch and wood chips delivered, and they work with Drake University, the supplier of water for the garden.

Robinson said he is most proud of Antonio Santos and Juan Chavez, whose tidy garden is an abundance of tomatoes, peppers and herbs.

"Their garden is beautiful," Robinson said. "They spend a lot of time out here. They have done us a great favor. If someone leaves or can't take care of their garden, those guys come in and fill it. And the foods they grow are delicious."

Friendship and sharing the fruit of their harvest is one of the best benefits of the communal garden, Robinson said. "Oh, that's great fun."

King, whose "salsa garden" promises to help her produce large batches of the spicy stuff, is pleased with her first attempt at gardening.

"I wanted an organic garden, and I eat a lot of salsa," she said. "I usually go to the farmers market but I won't go as much this year. I'll plant a lot more next year."

"It's relaxing," said Jamison, who waters and weeds her plot after she takes her son, Jeremy, to school and her great-niece, Alicia, to child care. "I'm going to eat lots more salads now. It's a lot different to be able to pull



JANET KLOCKENGA/THE REGISTER
 Drake neighborhood residents Kristin Wilson and son, Chess Montgomery, have worked hard on their plot.



JANET KLOCKENGA/THE REGISTER
 John Roby points to his plot. "I come out here every day and give it TLC," he says. He grows tomatoes, collard greens and zucchini.



JANET KLOCKENGA/THE REGISTER

your own vegetables out of the ground."

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Jayda Allen, representing the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa, stands proudly next to a tomato plant that her group planted at the Drake neighborhood community garden.



JANET KLOCKENGA/THE REGISTER

Drake neighborhood resident Sandra Jamison, shown with her great-niece, Alicia, 2, stands near her family's plot in the Drake community garden on 27th Street just south of University Avenue.








JANET KLOCKENGA/THE REGISTER

Drake neighborhood families and individuals tend more than 35 plots, and they have been harvesting food now for several weeks.

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