



Food for the Community

Loren Johnson tends to the expansion of the Goldendale Community Garden

By Jeanie Senior

Retired math professor Loren Johnson dips into the language of academia when he jokes that rather than having Master Gardener status, he is an adjunct Master Gardener.

“I am interested in vegetables,” says Loren, coordinator of the Goldendale Community Garden.

Master Gardeners and the local parks and recreation district established the garden in 2006. It is located across the lane from the community swimming pool.

Loren, retired from the faculty at the University of California at Santa Barbara, moved to Goldendale in 2004.

Now, he says, “I’m volunteering at the things I enjoy doing.”

That includes the garden, which Loren has managed for five years. He also works with the local Gleaners group, serves as a board member at the Farmers Market, and helps prepare and serve the meal at the Monday-night soup kitchen at Goldendale United Methodist Church.

It is the soup kitchen that will reap the first benefits of the garden’s recent expansion, which was funded by a \$4,700 grant from the National Immigrant Farmers Initiative.

“They do these kinds of grants all over the country,” says Loren.

Thanks to the grant, the garden doubled in size, and the new plots are



Loren Johnson, Goldendale Community Garden's coordinator, ensures the flourishing garden stays properly maintained.

growing produce for the community. As output expands, the vegetables will go to the local food bank and other groups. The aim is “to get people used to eating nutritious, healthy food,” Loren says.

Loren expects there will be plenty of vegetables—including lettuce, tomatoes, corn and squash—by the start of September.

The free community meals are served at the church Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m.

The original part of the garden includes more than 20 raised-bed plots where local gardeners rent space to grow vegetables, fruit and flowers. The rent pays for water and the use of tools and hoses.

The garden's most appealing feature may be the deer-proof fence that surrounds the entire space.

This summer, Katrina Guthrie, a grade school teacher in Wishram, is growing several kinds of beans as well as corn, peas, tomatoes, eggplant and potatoes

at the community garden—all crops she wouldn't be able to raise at her home outside Goldendale because of the deer.

She has rented garden space for four years, and praises Loren's management. She says the garden was untidy and untended before he came on board.

Loren's garden duties include hand-watering the new beds each morning and evening.

“Eventually we will have drip-line sprinklers,” he says. “But that will take just a little bit longer.”

He also weeds, and uses a string trimmer to clear out the weeds at the edge of the fence.

“I would love to have more people volunteering—or even to have people help occasionally, just come two or three times a week and help with the water and weeding,” Loren says. “Maintenance is critical.”

Volunteers, including Loren, have been remodeling space at the end of a building near the swimming pool to be used

to store equipment. They also are building plant racks where seedlings can be started.

The grant also paid for building three tunnel greenhouses in the new area of the garden. Loren says that means being able to grow lettuce and spinach through the winter.

“When it's cold, plants will grow well in there,” he says. “We should have a fairly good crop of lettuce all year long.”

The garden offers inspirational examples of making do. Recycled boards were used in construction of new raised beds, and frosted glass shower doors donated by Bishop Sanitation serve as wind shields for the tender young plants.

There is also a composting program, and “lots of helpful gardeners who are more than willing to help out and offer advice to new gardeners,” according to the garden's brochure. ■

For more information on how to get involved, call Loren at (509) 773-5817.