

Gardens coming to Maynooth

By Sarah Sobanski

Harvest the North wants to garden in Hastings Highlands.

The North Hastings Community Trust initiative has begun planning community gardens for Maynooth and its public school students this spring ? when it's hoping to have received close to \$700,000 in Ontario Trillium Foundation grants.

Local resident Christine Hass and Maynooth Public School principal Lisa Resmer have begun talks with Harvest the North. Hass has donated a portion of her property beside the school to the project. Resmer wants to see the beds incorporated into the student curriculum.

?We were going to build our own boxes behind our school in an area that the kindergartens have sort of reclaimed,? said Resmer. She explained the beds would've been incorporated into the children's natural curiosity time ? a program through the University of Toronto which looks at stewardship, inquiry and has students direct their own learning. ?Now that [the community gardens] are going on, we love the idea of having a huge community connection.?

Hass's backyard and the school's backyard connect. Hass donated her land to see the project grow and help the community.

?I have always been an avid gardener and watched with great interest the building of raised beds in Bancroft,? said Hass, a former teacher from the school. She's also developing a tearoom on the property. ?Last spring I built three at my home in Maple Leaf. They are a wonderful way to garden, especially when you get older and it is hard to get up and down. I also really enjoy getting things moving in Maynooth and getting others excited about new ideas. Offering my land for community gardens fits right into this community concern. It would be wonderful to teach people to grow food and feed themselves and to get kids excited about growing and eating healthy food.?

Resmer wants to see the gardens incorporated into science lessons for all grades. She'd also like to see what the students harvest before the summer break incorporated into the school's nutrition program.

?What we had planned for the summer was an idea offering parents an opportunity to adopt the gardens. They would have a week where they were responsible for harvesting what was ready to be harvested and have to water and weed and that way would be able to keep it up over the summer,? Resmer explained. ?They would harvest what they could eat and it would still be open for the community to come as well. That's what I had envisioned.?

Harvest the North is moving into its third year with community gardens in Bancroft.

?We've learned a lot and we want to take some of that learning and apply it to more remote areas,? said North Hastings Community Trust program co-ordinator Jane Kali. Harvest the North has goals to reach Coe Hill and Lake St. Peter as well.

Volunteers for the trust Jenny Katz and Dianne Eastman have developed the Community Food Cycle model to determine the outcomes of the program and what works.

?We know the gardens bring people together, reduce isolation, increase inclusion and create a healthy community. We are looking for support in these communities to make this happen,? said Kali. ?It's quite ambitious for us but we did apply for Trillium funding and we are really, really hopeful.?

She added, ?If we don't get the money we are going to plan B which is to just go hard anyway and rely on the generosity from the community.?

Kali suggested that generosity could include people reaching out to get involved with the garden project. She said lots of people have growing expertise in the area and their help would be very much appreciated. Maynooth residents and business owners can also donate land or sponsor other gardens in the community ? the school is just the beginning.

?Right now, we rely on donations and big hearts and generous spirits. That's what I love about this community but I know this community also struggles to live,? said Kali. She suggested the goal is for the gardens to receive a stamp of support from council and to find a way forward from there.