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## Outdoor classroom growing at St. Sebastian Parish School

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By Maria Lindsay

WEST AKRON — St. Sebastian Parish School is digging into a new project designed to supplement classroom learning.

A little-used 6,500-square-foot sunny area of the school campus was recently turned into Sebastian's Garden: an organic classroom and market garden that is run under the guidance of John Jewell, a parent of one student and a visiting professor at the Center for Entrepreneurship at the College of Wooster.

"This is a great opportunity to use unused land on the property and help the teachers supplement classes in a different way," said Jewell, who is coordinating the garden project.

With the help of two student interns — Stephanie Megas and Patrick Brennan — and \$650 from the Master Gardeners of Summit County, \$500 from Crown Point Ecology Center and some funds from the school, the grassy area was transformed into an outdoor classroom with students helping to plant various seedlings.

The largest portion of the garden was planted with tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, onions, carrots, beets, beans, squash, pumpkins, melons, zucchini and eggplant, according to Jewell.

Another area was planted with herbs such as basil, chives, parsley, rosemary and sage, and sunflowers, ornamental corn and raspberries also were planted, he added.

Jewell also said one raised bed was turned into a sensory garden for young students, with plants that look, smell, taste or feel different.

In the future, Jewell said concord grapes, blackberries and blueberries will be added, and a red worm compost using scraps from the school's lunchroom will be created.

The garden space is intended as an outdoor classroom/laboratory for lessons and experiences about organic gardening and nutrition for students in preschool through eighth grade, according to Erin Haslinger, marketing and public relations representative for St. Sebastian School.

"Many of the teachers are excited and are on board in adapting the curriculum," added Jewell.

Jewell explained that Amy Berens, Crown Point Ecology Center education and volunteer coordinator, is helping teachers develop lessons that will integrate aspects of organic gardening and nutrition into science, social studies, economics, mathematics and art classes. Jewell added that teachers are developing topics such as entrepreneurship, planning and logistics, social justice issues such as access and distribution of fresh food, and habitat formation.

The lesson plans will be presented to students this fall, he said.

The garden will offer students a variety of hands-on gardening activities, and supplemental gardening workshops through Crown Point Ecology Center are also being planned, according to Haslinger.

The garden also will provide students at the school with healthy snacks using produce that will be made into "Grab & Go Snack Packs," she added.

Some of the produce from the garden also will be donated to the Good Samaritan Hunger Center, a food donation group that operates out of the school and provides delivery of donated food to those in need.

In addition, a small farmer's market will sell some of the produce from the garden to the community after Mass at St. Sebastian Church to fund next year's gardening efforts.

Principal Greg Garey said he thinks the garden is "a great thing for students."

"The garden will offer students a different way to learn about science and other subjects," he said. "We also hope this will support our hunger center next door, and one day, we hope to set up a salad bar in the lunchroom for our students."

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A sunny 6,500-square-foot area of St. Sebastian Parish School recently was turned into Sebastian's Garden. Some of the raised garden beds are shown above.



These kindergarten students helped plant seedlings this spring for Sebastian's Garden. Photos courtesy of St. Sebastian Parish School