

Homegrown, hands-on idea takes root

Sometime this spring, after the last snow has melted, the open space between East Valley High School and East Valley Middle School will take on a new look. What is now an empty parcel of real estate will become a hub of activity as the Farm to School program literally sprouts from the ground.

Farm to School is the next phase of the district's health and fitness initiative (Express newsletter, February 2009). The initiative began with the promotion of healthy eating habits and the consumption of locally grown products.

Now, students will have a chance to get their hands dirty, addressing the food pyramid from a producer's point of view. They'll see – and do – all the things that happen before food magically appears on the table. Roughly five acres of open ground at Sullivan and Wellesley will be set aside for raised beds in which students will grow a variety of crops.

It was a prophetic convergence of three similar, but independent, ideas that launched the project, says East Valley parent Lynette Romney.

Romney herself had envisioned a school garden as a logical extension of the healthy eating initiative. So had East Valley High School Vice Principal John Savage and local agribusinessman Eldon Jons, owner/operator of AC Starr Farms of Newman Lake.

After the three got together, voila! A committee was formed,



Farm to School committee members include Eldon Jons, Dawn Wieber, Lynette Romney, John Glenewinkel, Jodi Brown and Barbara Cruse.

master gardeners were contacted and a firm plan was outlined for the 2010 growing season. The project will be developed with all donated materials and labor.

“This project is exciting because of the benefits it will bring on so many levels,” says Romney, who is leading the 12-member organizing committee. “Whether their interests are in science, agriculture, nutrition or business, we can involve a wide range of students in everything from soil testing to harvesting. It’s also a great project for connecting our schools with the community.”

Indeed, the organizing committee includes a diverse cross-section of local talent that includes Romney, Savage and Jons, along with: Chris Hilgert, WSU Master Gardeners program; Pat Munts and Gary Varrella, WSU Extension; Dawn Wieber, Second Harvest Food Bank; plus EVSD staff members Georjean Kuntz, Barbara Cruse, Joe Kostecka, John Glenewinkel and Jodi Brown.

Interested in participating? Volunteers are welcome. Contact Lynette Romney at 230-9436 or momromney@earthlink.net.