

The Daily Gleaner (Fredericton)

An example of community

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About 18 months ago, I was at the Open Spaces Forum in Fredericton put on by Greater Fredericton Social Innovation (GFSI).

It was there that I first heard some folks talking about trying to establish one or more community gardens in the Fredericton area.

There was lots of enthusiasm for the concept of providing the opportunity for residents from all walks of life to grow their own vegetables. It was seen as a way to share knowledge and resources between individuals and families who might otherwise not have the chance.

But from concept to the table, there are can be lots of hurdles, regulations and other challenges to overcome, which, in this case, included no land and no money.

No description I give will do justice to what transpired between the starting point and last Saturday at the New Brunswick Community Harvest Gardens Fall Harvest Party.

The dozens of participants and supporters who gathered at the hall at St. Mary's Anglican Church to celebrate the first successful season couldn't keep the smiles off their faces. It was a joyous occasion of sharing.

Although the garden and the subsequent harvest are the obvious centerpieces on the

table, what has struck me the most is the pure community aspect of it all.

When there was nothing, St. Mary's Anglican Church stepped up and said yes, we would love to have the land beside our church in Devon used as the site for the first garden.

Then the provincial Department of Culture, Wellness and Sport, through its Active Communities Program, provided the first \$1,000 to get things started.

From there it just seemed to snowball. The gardens were seen as a great opportunity by several United Way funded agencies to enhance the programs provided to some of their clients. So the Fredericton Food Bank and the United Way developed a partnership to support the work of the gardens.

The City of Fredericton stepped up to the plate, donating 13 cubic metres of compost each year for each NBCHG garden site. The city also awarded NBCHG \$1,500 for 2011 for the fall harvest event and capital infrastructure.

Advice and support came from the federal Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; much needed cash came from the TD Bank, the Progressive Credit Union, Wal-mart through its Wal-mart-Evergreen Green Grants Program and from individuals.

Participants ranged from the young to the more mature; the homeowner to the renter; the experienced gardener to the novice; single individuals to families; life-long residents of Fredericton to the incredible group of newcomers from Bhutan who worked rain or shine to help prepare the soil for its initial seeding; and a wide-ranging group of volunteers who did everything from providing the professional design of the gardens to installing the deer fencing and the water collection system.

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I know that many were involved in this development, but I would like to single out three individuals: Edee Klee, Suzanne White and Elizabeth Crawford-Thurber.

From the start they have kept the goal in site. Although the garden could be seen as reaching the goal, they see it as only the first step of developing numerous sites throughout the area. Based on their track record so far, you can expect to see more gardens cropping up next year.

Councillor Eric Megarity's participation also deserves noting. He was one of the first to make a personal donation to the garden and has been a great champion within city hall.

When everyone is included, we have three levels of government, the faith community, several non-profit agencies, financial institutions, big business and small business, individuals and families all working towards one goal.

I can't think of a better example of community.

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