

Secret Sandburg garden exposed on campus

May 24, 2012

Post photo by Sierra Riesberg.

Have you ever wondered where the tomato was grown that you were smacking your lips on in the Sandburg Café? Three hidden gardens dot UW-Milwaukee's campus, growing much of the produce used at Sandburg.

On Thursday, April 19, the Sandburg garden was mapped with blasts of neon orange spray paint; it was the official groundbreaking. Despite the cold breeze and wet soil, volunteers and organizers put shovels to dirt to make it happen.



UWM's Environmental Sustainability Coordinator Kate Nelson was among the pack of about five present, looking with high spirits for the Sandburg greenery and community garden.

"Students are going to be able to look down from the café and say 'I got that from down there!'" Nelson said.

The UWM alumnus was dropping plum, hazelnut and apricot trees into the soil for a fresh harvest in the fall. The garden is tucked away south of the Sandburg East tower, where café diners and residents can have an open view of the blooms. For the adventurous scenic walkers, memorial pathways will be constructed around the garden that leads to the Klostche Center.

Nelson says a community garden will be developed and ready for picking this fall as well.

"That means anyone can come pick a strawberry for a snack," Nelson said. She added that a pumpkin patch, herbs and berries may be added to the shared garden.

UWM Restaurant Operations administrators said they are in support of Nelson's Food & Garden Club, which carries with it the spirit of UWM's green initiatives.

"It just makes sense," Residential Food Service Manager Matt Powers said.

Powers says the rooftop garden was a huge success, but has limited growing space. That is where the campus gets its supply of herbs, peppers and lettuce. Powers says he wants to use the Sandburg garden to grow more of a variety and integrate the ingredients and produce into the menu at Sandburg Café.

"This is a great opportunity to bring the community together with Restaurant Operations," Powers said.

Powers said that Madison, for example, defines local as anything grown in a twenty-mile radius around the city. However, for UWM Restaurant Operations, local is anything grown in Wisconsin.

Powers gives a LOCAL seal on the menu and products for items that are, by their definition, local: Living, Operating, Consuming, Acquiring, Locally. The seal also means that the main ingredient in any house prepared items must be from a Wisconsin company or farm.

"We need to educate students as well as our own employees on why we do what we do," Powers said.

Restaurant Operations also uses a water system that adds ozone into the water, helping destroy bacteria.

These gardens provide for our campus and community, but Nelson said that the club's volunteers help make the final goal achievable.

"[Volunteers] are students who want to learn about gardening and support local food," Nelson said. "Many students want to learn about sustainability, but don't know where to get involved. Food tends to be a gateway to sustainability."

Danielle Goodrich, UWM senior, is double majoring in architecture and conservation and environmental sciences. She said she became involved with the garden club because of a competition that was proposed last fall to help design the Sandburg garden. Goodrich said she jumped at the opportunity and volunteered to help in that competition with three other students creating the design.

Goodrich says she will be helping with the process of the Sandburg garden and will probably help with future projects while at UWM.

"I think it's a really cool idea and I hope it does go further to help get students involved," she said.

In the end, Powers describes the recycling and going green movement as "an effort of Restaurant Operations as a whole." Both Powers and Nelson appear excited of that fact that we can grow, distribute and recycle what we need on campus, and the lengths that UWM has accomplished thus far.

To volunteer, email knelson6@uwm.edu.