

SHARING PROGRESS

How OSF HealthCare is building a lasting relationship through love and service

Community gardens providing traditional benefits to modern health care

Designing a new rural health care model in Streator means finding new solutions to the issues

OSF HealthCare believes the community garden concept has several benefits, and is devoted to



The community garden at OSF HealthCare Center for Health – Streator provides the community with healthy food and an opportunity to learn about gardening.

facing rural health care providers. It means, in part, finding new ways to use the resources at hand.

In 2013, a small community garden – about 50 square feet in size – had been created on the grounds of what would become OSF HealthCare Center for Health – Streator. It had been maintained by Mission Partners, with the harvested crops donated to local food pantries.

“The idea was to improve the health of the community,” said Richard Struck, an electrician at the Center for Health who helps manage the garden. “We wanted to provide people with improved nutrition choices, and help them get some exercise in the process.”

As a part of a commitment to care for the community, beginning in January 2016 OSF HealthCare recognized the value of the garden and the opportunity it provided to impact the community through collaboration.

optimizing its potential, according to Don Damron, vice president of ambulatory services for the Center for Health. The concept is a perfect fit for what the organization is trying to accomplish as it reimagines how rural health care should look to better serve the community.

The garden allows an opportunity to address food insecurity in the community by providing healthy foods to local pantries. It provides people a chance to gain gardening knowledge, empowering them to do it on their own. It provides an opportunity to increase education about nutrition and food preparation, helping people make healthier dietary decisions. Gardening also provides people with a healthy activity and an opportunity to forge lasting community bonds.

“As with many of our rural health initiatives, we have learned the value of collaborating with community partners,” Damron said. “We’re coordinating

with the school systems and the Salvation Army to enhance educational opportunities. We work with the University of Illinois Extension for insight into education and growing. We also have a partnership with a local behavioral health provider, who assist with the maintenance of the gardens and uses the activity as a therapeutic benefit. It goes beyond the results of the harvest. There are benefits to caring for the garden.”

A second garden at Northlawn Junior High School has sprouted, with the goal of helping to educate the younger generation on gardening and making healthy choices. The group also works with FFA groups at the local high schools, who have their own gardens, too.

In 2017, the gardeners donated about 1,560 pounds of vegetables to places like the Streator Land Community Food Pantry, the food pantry in New Beginnings Baptist Church, the Streator Salvation Army and Grace Community Church just north of the city.

The gardens are thriving, producing loads of fresh

tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, potatoes, peppers, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and more. It’s making an impact, and Struck hopes to keep bringing more people on board.

The concept has also expanded to Ottawa, where OSF HealthCare recently created a garden at its Ottawa South facility.

“It’s just really healthy on a lot of different levels,” said Struck. “You can bring home healthy food, plus it’s a good way to relieve stress and commune with nature. I recognize just how powerful it is to foster and nurture life, and I enjoy doing it.”

OSF HealthCare invites anyone in the Streator or Ottawa areas who want to participate to call Ellen Vogel, the community health engagement program manager in Streator, at (815) 673-4528.



Opening an outpatient facility at 111 Spring Street in 2016 was just the beginning of an expanded commitment to the Streator community by OSF HealthCare. As renovations to OSF HealthCare Center for Health – Streator continue, so does collaboration between the health care ministry and the community. We’re partnering with local leaders and organizations to offer residents better access to health and wellness resources. This article is one of a nine-part series honoring the Streator Sesquicentennial. Watch for more stories as we celebrate a community we’re proud to call home.

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