

NEWS

Teaching gardens take the classroom outside

Area on campus will serve as an educational tool for local children

By Kayla Sibilia
Staff Writer

The opening ceremony for the St. Michael's Teaching Garden between McCarthy Arts Center and St. Edmund's Hall was held on Monday Sept. 24. The masterminds behind new idea are Dr. Valerie Bang-Jensen from the education department and Dr. Mark Lubkowitz from the biology department.

The education and biology departments at St. Michael's have been working together since 2003 to create a teaching garden that will educate the community on the different trees and flowers scattered around the campus.

There are different sections of the teaching gardens; books in bloom, native plants of Vermont and the arboretum. With these three ideas, the education and biology classes have come together to create stimulating activities for the local children and for the college to benefit from.

"We wanted to find a way to make the campus an outdoors laboratory," Lubkowitz said.

The books in bloom garden is shaped in a 'V,' as if it were an open book. The objective of the garden is to incorporate meaning-

ful flowers from children's books into the gardens for children to do activities that will help them explore nature, think back to the story and to enjoy the flowers.

"It is clear to everyone that vegetables are food and provide nourishment for the body," Bang-Jensen said. "The flowers in some of the books have a symbolic meaning. For example, in the story 'Miss Rumphius,' there are lupine seeds that represent what the character in 'Miss Rumphius' does to make the world a more beautiful place."

Activities created for the teaching gardens are made by the students. Kelly Egan, a sophomore who is part of Bang-Jensen's children's literature class, made an activity called 'Garden Hunt.'

"My group made a scavenger hunt," Egan said. "There are different flowers with different literature books. The kids had to find the flowers that matched with the clues."

Not all of the plants in the gardens provide a message about children's books. One example is the native plants of Vermont. This piece of the garden is important section to the St. Michael's teaching gardens because it includes plants that originated in Vermont,

just like St. Michael's did 103 years ago.

One plant that originated in Vermont is the lilly of the valley. It has the effects similar to the plant digitalis. These types of plants can cause cardiac problems and can be deadly, said botany student Ashley Harkins.

"The reason I like this plant is because it amazes me that a plant that is so pretty can be so dangerous," Harkins said. "You can't really tell if a plant is safe or not, simply by how its looks."

It is important to have names for the plants because then they will be embedded in your mind, she said.

"It seems you recognize a flower if there is a name below it you will more likely remember that specific flower," Lubkowitz said.

The third garden is the arboretum, a tour of the trees on campus. The botany classes traveled around St. Michael's campus to reveal the names of the trees.

"My class looked up and researched three types of trees to share and teach to the literature class," Harkins said. "We taught them general information about the ginkgo, tamarack and the sugar maple."



Photo By Sheila Catanzarita

Children and parents gather at the dedication of the teaching gardens.

The arboretum information is researched by the botany students and then given to the education classes to create activities for the public.

"The tree activities are available to anyone, teachers, community members, families, to use," Bang-Jensen said. "St. Michael's students can use them with their 'little brothers/sisters' and other groups like DREAM."

There has been support from the community to make the Teaching Gardens a success.

"Everyone has been so sup-

portive," Bang-Jensen said. "We have received three grants from the faculty development community, contributions from local nurseries and a few faculty members have brought flowers."

The Class of 2007 donated seven stone benches, which are sporadically placed around the gardens.

"I hope everyone enjoys the gardens and we can always use the help to weed," Bang-Jensen said