

By CHRIS TRAINOR

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It's amazing how the smallest things can help bring a community together.

Even something as small as a quarter of an acre.

But that's exactly what's happening in the Ninety Six Mill Village, as many residents in that neighborhood have come together to create a community garden on Draper Street. Not only that, but vegetables from the garden have been donated to senior citizens and those in need.

The garden — dubbed "God's Little Acre" by members of the Ninety Six Mill Village Neighborhood Association — began to take shape in April. It is situated at the end of Draper, near the old mill site.

Ninety Six Mill Village Neighborhood Association's Gayle Ostrowski recently gathered with several of her gardening neighbors and discussed the benefits of the garden.

"There was a grant offered through Healthy Greenwood Neighborhoods and Toni Able assisted us with getting that," Ostrowski said. "We talked to the town about this little plot of land here and what they were going to do with it. We talked to (Mayor Arvest Turner), and he said, 'If y'all improve it, y'all can use it.' So we are blessed to have about a quarter acre here."

There have been a number of veggies planted in the mill village garden, including squash, zucchini, jalapenos, banana peppers, bell peppers, tomatoes, pole beans, okra, cucumbers and more.

Residents Mary Ann Goodman and Joann Eichelberger have put the squash and zucchini to good use, as they have made numerous squash casseroles and loaves of zucchini bread and delivered them to senior citizens who reside in the mill village.

"We wanted to do something with this produce for our senior citizens," Goodman said. "So we just started on the first street of the mill village and worked the whole mill village. Joann and I did more than 30 squash casseroles, and she and my husband delivered them to the senior citizens."

Goodman and Eichelberger also made and delivered 42 loaves of zucchini bread.

There is also a row of flowers lining the edge of the garden. Ostrowski said they were planted in honor of her good friend Harvey Sewell, who is suffering from cancer.

Ostrowski said the garden has led to more than fresh vegetables. It also has helped develop new friendships among neighbors.

"Not only have we reaped the benefit of fresh vegetables, we've reaped the benefit of new friendships," Ostrowski said. "When the garden crew comes out, they come from everywhere. (Community members gather) until 10 o'clock at night, at the (nearby) picnic table."

Healthy Greenwood Neighborhoods' Toni Able said she is proud of the way the Ninety Six Mill Village garden has turned out.

"It makes me giddy," Able said, with a laugh. "This is how it has worked in the four other neighborhoods that are participating in the community gardening project. I have heard wonderful stories about how it is providing the opportunity for neighbors to come together, to talk together. It is providing opportunities for neighborhood leaders to discover the assets within their own neighborhoods to do great things."

