

Therapy Garden Blossoms

PROVIDENCE BENEDICTINE began to explore in earnest the benefits of its beautiful outside spaces in 2004. As it happened, Polly Youngren, R.N., assistant director of nursing, was finishing a horticulture therapy certificate program. “Upon the completion of my certification, I was asked to spearhead the development of PBNC’s Therapy Gardens,” Polly recalls.

“The idea was to create a horticultural retreat – a green-space respite for residents, visitors and staff. Additionally, we wanted to incorporate a multigenerational aspect to the garden’s development and to make sure the garden supported some of the therapeutic needs of our residents. It was a tall order to fill, but now that the garden is almost complete, I think we captured the essence of what we were originally trying to achieve.”

Therapy gardens date back to ancient times. In the 1100s, St. Bernard described the therapeutic benefits of a hospice garden created at a monastery in Clairvaux, France – privacy, green plants, bird song, fragrance.

Today, the positives of such gardens are well documented. Studies show that residents are happier in the presence of a therapy garden; feel more engaged in their surroundings; and often respond more readily to a care program that involves nurturing the

garden’s plants and grounds. Enhancing people’s psychological, physical and social well-being is the reason the PBNC gardens were dreamed of and designed.

Especially, Polly says, the gardens have enhanced the total community. “We see families and residents strolling and visiting together along the garden’s pathways. Our staff take their breaks by walking through the gardens, sometimes having their meals there, and notice all the big and small transformations that occur with each seasonal change.

“Physical and occupational therapy staff move residents outside for exercising in the garden – from walking, to holding a spade, to planting some seeds. There are physical and emotional gifts on every soil mound in this garden.”

By design, several groups got into the act of creating this special space. PBNC received a grant from the Society for Arts in Health to help pay for the raised beds and decorative tiles. In addition to financial support garnered through the PBNC Foundation from grants and private donations, the center received countless volunteer hours in labor from local high school students, as well as plants and soil donated by local nurseries.



The arrival of summer and warmer weather allows the beauty of the garden to shine.

Emily Dazey, PBNC administrator, was committed to the project from its inception. “Our grounds are so beautiful. I think it was just a natural extension to create a space that further focuses on nurturing our residents, visitors and staff members,” Emily says. “So many of our residents have made their livings farming and working in the soil, that green spaces like these form a bridge to their former lives. The garden provides a sense of comfort that couldn’t really be achieved in any other way.”

Polly believes the garden has enlightened the entire community about the process of life. She notes that the journey to completing the garden has taught everyone a bit more patience, wonder, teamwork, humor, and ability to relish the small successes along the way.

“Just reading our guest book inspires me,” says Polly. “One resident wrote to her daughter that ‘the garden is a beautiful place to be. When you have plentiful troubles, you can come to the garden and forget them.’” ■