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BY CATHY HAMILTON-WISSMER

Directorate of Public Works

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Between the buildings, dotting the north side of the inner courtyard of the Warrior Transition Battalion buildings are organic, raised garden beds.

The Warrior Transition Battalion Healing Garden is a lunchtime volunteer project for Gary Ouellette, a retired sergeant major from the I Corps chaplains office and current Madigan Army Medical Center employee.

A passionate gardener, he shares his talents with the residents, co-workers and other staff of the buildings.

“We are having fun with it,” Ouellette said.

Raised beds have been built using donated materials and a small budget to provide the WTB service members with an opportunity to learn to garden, enjoy the relaxation and reward that comes from growing your own little patch of paradise.

Ouellette and gardeners hand water the beds. The soil mix is a compound of mushroom compost, potting soil mix and compost from Earthworks. Ouellette uses a moisture meter to measure water retention as soil needs to be fairly dry for peppers and tomatoes. Which has not been a problem this summer, he said.

Gardener Pfc. Kaitlyn Quinn made her first garden as a teenager in the Tri-Cities area.

“First, my dad yelled when I broke up the grass, then he helped me build a good garden,” she said.

She has tomatoes, catnip, chocolate mint, strawberries and some flowers growing. She has already harvested eight heads of romaine lettuce.

“It’s rewarding,” Quinn said.

Plants are made available to all the inhabitants of the building complex in the spring.

“For the Love of Tomatoes’ is a tomato start give away incentive I started last year, supported by the King County Master Gardeners Program and starts from my own greenhouse,” Ouellette said. “Only one co-worker brought me in any of his tomatoes last year.”

This year the Northwest Joint Regional Correctional Facility on Joint Base Lewis-McChord joined in on the fun. The sturdy tomato starts donated by the greenhouses at the correctional facility and Ouellette’s house are all planted in the raised beds, now bursting with color as harvest time is upon us.

“Gardens are community building,” Ouellette said. “People are getting away from knowing where their food comes from and from being outside.”

So he encourages service members to garden, plant flowers and build a memorial in their garden beds. He said some people choose to work on their gardens at night when it’s quiet.

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