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Community garden built for growth

By Sgt. Adam C. Keith/19th Public Affairs Detachment

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Hunched over digging through plots of wet soil for entrenched weeds, cutting tall grass and removing dead plants might not sound like a celebration to some, but for volunteers at the Community Garden Volunteer Work Party on Joint Base Lewis-McChord April 16, it was a labor of love.

The event, part of a weeklong celebration of Earth Day on JBLM, gave the volunteers an opportunity to come together and help the environment while improving the installation's community garden.

"This is the third year that we have been making Earth Day a weeklong celebration and we've been able to make it bigger and better every year," said Miriam Easley, the JBLM sustainability outreach coordinator. "Today we are working on the community garden on (Lewis North) by cleaning them out and fixing up the general area so the gardeners that we have this year aren't overwhelmed with weeds and overgrowth when they show up to plant their crops."

The event also gave those who planned to rent plots at the garden the opportunity to come together and get to know one another before the start of the growing season.

"One of the things that I really like to push for this community garden is the community aspect because you have all kinds of people coming here to garden while helping each other out," said Easley. "Last year I had a couple of plots and if I couldn't make it out someone would water my plants if they saw that it needed it, and I would do the same for them."

Virgina Rawlings, who has been a volunteer at the JBLM Women, Infants and Children office for the past 25 years, said the best part about the garden was the chance to interact with the JBLM community and that she looked forward to seeing her fellow gardeners every year.

"Gardening is such a great activity, especially for families and kids," said Rawlings. "And it's a great way to meet new people."

Described by regulars of the community garden as their 'champion gardener,' Rawlings has rented multiple plots for the past three years, even having a plot dedicated to growing food for her pet bunny, Shadow.

"It feels great to be able to invest yourself in a particular garden bed and come back every year," she said. "I plan on doing it for as long as I'm able."

The event also attracted Soldiers, who didn't have any plots at the garden but were looking to lend a helping hand.

"This is actually my first time visiting the gardens. I didn't realize that they were here before today," said Pfc. Thomas C. Pyeatte, a generator mechanic with Headquarters Support Company, I Corps. "I think it's awesome; people who live on post or even off post might not have the space or opportunity to grow anything, so this gives them that opportunity to grow flowers or other plants while enjoying the outdoors."

Pyeatte said he enjoyed volunteering at the event not only because of the benefit to the garden but also because he was able to take something from the experience as well.



Sgt. Adam C. Keith
Pfc. John C. Rawls (right) and Pfc. Thomas C. Pyeatte (left), mechanics with Headquarters Support Company, I Corps, work to remove weeds from garden beds on April 16.

“I was a military brat growing up so we moved around a lot, and I haven’t been able to do a whole lot of yard work or gardening since I was little when I would garden with my mom,” he said. “I haven’t seen her in almost two years so this is nice because it kind of takes me back to my childhood.”

Pyeatte said he is even considering renting a plot at the garden.

“It could be a good opportunity to bring my wife and me even closer together as a couple and just give us an opportunity to get out of the house,” he said. “I live in Tacoma, and I’m not a city person at all, so this would be a good way to get back to nature and maybe start a new hobby.”

Easley has big plans for the garden and hopes to attract more people like Pyeatte in the future.

“One of the things that I love about this place is you have people who have never gardened before and could kill a cactus and you also have people like Mrs. Rawlings who is awesome and can grow tomato plants in the Pacific Northwest that I’ve only seen in the southeast,” said Easley. “I love to see people like that coming together to help and learn from one another.”

“I would really like to see more gardens like this on base; right now we are planning to build one on McChord,” she said. “I want these to become a place not just for gardening but a place where you can bring your family. I hope this can be a space that lets people get away from their everyday life and relax.”

The community garden is located on JBLM Lewis North and plots can be rented for the growing season from the Northwest Adventure Center for \$25.

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