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Sustainable JBLM: Community gardens highlight weeklong Earth Day celebration

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At Joint Base Lewis-McChord Earth Day was not a day at all, but instead a week filled with opportunities to get involved in the spirit of conservation and sustainability.

There were six different community garden events, and a week of hard work ending Saturday with a little bit of fun at the Earth day Flea Market.

At the community garden events April 22 at Madigan Army Medical Center's Child Development Center and McChord's CDC, 60 children planted flowers and vegetables.

Everyone was down in the dirt and didn't seem to notice that they were actually working, said Miriam Easley, sustainability outreach coordinator at JBLM. Kids learned a lot from volunteers who showed them what to do.

"My favorite thing so far this week was probably to work with the kids digging in the dirt," said Colin Brooks, director of special events for Family and Moral, Welfare and Recreation at JBLM. "Some had never gardened before, so it was cute to see."

On April 24, the last of the gardening events took place, but volunteers weren't planting a community garden at all, instead they were building one.

With volunteers and materials donated from a local Lowe's Home Improvement store, an empty field near the McChord horse stables started its transformation into a community garden with 30 raised garden beds.

Although this was supposed to be a one-day event, building the garden will take more time. Easley's goal is to have the beds finished by Mother's Day, and she welcomes more volunteers.

Once the beds are finished the area will be open to anyone who wishes to rent one, at a cost of \$25 each season.

"Hopefully people will be able to learn more about growing their own produce and have the opportunity to spend more time outdoors," said Anthony Salvatore, human resource manager at Lakewood's Lowe's and volunteer at the event.

One volunteer was already enjoying his time outdoors, as he worked to build the beds.

"I have experience with this, since it was also my Eagle (Scout) project, and I figured it would be fun," said Airmen First class James Ratzlaff. "It's also nice because I miss doing manual labor."

Ratzlaff is a finance specialist with the 62nd Comptroller Squadron on McChord Field.

On Saturday, two traditionally separate events, Earth Day and the Spring Flea Market, were combined.

"It was the most efficient thing to do, to combine the events, and they go hand in hand," Easley said. "Plus sustainability is also about efficiency, so it just made sense."

Visitors not only got bargains, but military families made some money for items they may have just thrown out or donated.



Scott Hansen/Northwest Guardian
Airman 1st Class Amanda Lewis, left, 1st Lt. Samantha Cazzatt, middle, and Airman 1st Class James Ratzlaff prepare one of 30 garden beds on McChord Field.

“It was a real win combining the events; some people came for Earth Day and stayed for the flea market and vice versa,” Easley said.

Conservation is not a new theme on JBLM, and Easley said that she tries to keep it in peoples minds all year long.

Conservation is great for families and military installations, she said, because much of what people can do will save or even earn them money in return, like recycling.

Conservation is much easier than people think, and many have already incorporated it into their own lives, Easley said. People can take simple steps like getting a programmable thermostat, recycling, bringing their own grocery bags to the store and carpooling.

Overall Easley said this week was very successful in her eyes, and she had a ton of fun.

“It was a lot of stuff to do, but it worked out really well,” Easley said.

If you missed last week’s Earth Day events and want to learn about conservation or to volunteer, contact Easley at miriam.e.easley.ctr@mail.mil.

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