

photo by Wanda McConnell



The Seniors Health Resource Team and seniors in North Kildonan are hoping to develop the Douglas Avenue right-of-way into the Millennium Gardens. Among those involved in the project are (from left), Sonja Lundstrom, Anne Watt, Annette Henson, Anne Bendera, Olive Conley, and (kneeling) Helen Blahey, Cathy Wall, and Eleanor Stelmack.

Their 'field of dreams'

By Wanda McConnell
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They're calling it their 'field of dreams.'

A group of North Kildonan seniors, led by the Seniors Health Resource Team for River East, envisions taking a 1.7-acre piece of the Douglas Avenue right-of-way and transforming it into a community park.

The 'Millennium Gardens' as they're calling it, will feature raised gardens, flower beds, a gazebo, picnic shelters and benches, and even croquet courts and lawn bowling greens. A market garden is also part of the long-range vision.

It will take five to 10 years to see the project to completion, but the seniors want to get it off the ground this summer to mark the new millennium and to leave a

lasting legacy, says registered nurse Sonja Lundstrom, who with occupational therapist Eleanor Stelmack, make up the Seniors Health Resource Team.

The Douglas Avenue right-of-way is currently a grassy, treed area that fronts Henderson Highway and extends east from Chief Peguis Trail. The city may someday decide to make it a roadway that continues on towards Lagimodiere Boulevard, but in the meantime, says Lundstrom, "we can make good use of the land."

Senior Annette Henson agrees. "It's a shame to see the land there, doing nothing," she says, adding that 60 years ago, it was rich earth that was used by the market gardeners that dominated the area.

The seniors are awaiting the city's final approval to use the land. Meanwhile,

they're soliciting support from the community in the form of financial donations and gifts in kind. They could be things like boards and posts to build raised beds, picnic shelters and tables, gifts of benches, aggregate for pathways, or even the use of a backhoe.

Plans call for seniors and local students to work together to develop the site. The raised garden beds will be for the use of seniors, but the park will be for the enjoyment of the entire community.

Senior Olive Conley can't wait for the project to begin. "It's time we got working on something and letting people know we're not just vegetating," she says.

That's a very important aspect to the project, says Lundstrom.

The Millennium Gardens are going to be a chance for apartment-bound seniors to get out and get their hands

dirty doing something they loved doing when they lived in their own homes. At the same time, the seniors' physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health is going to be enhanced.

"And besides, River East has some of the finest gardeners around," she adds.

Many of those apartment dwellers are getting a chance to do some gardening already. With the assistance of the Seniors Health Resource Team and the financial support of Martin Bergen, raised gardens have been built at five apartment blocks in North Kildonan. All of the blocks are owned by Bergen and are also sites where the health team holds regular clinics.

But it's the land on the Douglas Avenue right-of-way that really has Lundstrom and her seniors excited. "You look at that land and it's like gold," Lundstrom says.

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