

Garden Club helps renovate Petaluma's Unity Garden

\$1,000 grant supports new Master Gardeners education initiative |

JANET PERRY

FOR THE ARGUS-COURIER

December 12, 2022, 7:00PM



(L-R) Suzi Grady of Bounty Farm meets with Bryce Sumner of the Petaluma Garden Club and Renee Hayes of the Master Gardener program of Sonoma County at the Unity Garden located within the Bounty Farm. The Petaluma Garden Club donated \$1,000 for master gardeners to work on and do educational workshops there. Tuesday, December 06, 2022. _ (CRISSY PASCUAL/ARGUS-COURIER STAFF)

Talk about a budding relationship. A \$1,000 donation that the Petaluma Garden Club just gave to revamp the Unity Garden at Bounty Farms will help support an education initiative under a new collaboration with the UC Master Gardener Program.

The project, says Bryce Sumner, a member of the Petaluma Garden Club and also a member of the UC Master Gardener program of Sonoma County, is "an effort to set up a demo garden to reach out to people who come to the Bounty Farm to buy vegetables."

Suzi Grady, Bounty Farm's director, explained that when the master gardeners approached Bounty Farm to do a collaborative project, she gave them a long list of possibilities.

"They chose to sponsor the Unity garden," Grady said. "I think tapping into and starting this relationship with the master gardeners helps us to push forward our educational initiatives and build our community members' capacity to grow food for themselves. That's where we see it fitting into our big picture of community food security, through building skills and interest and people being able to feed themselves."

A hunger-fighting program of Petaluma People Services Center, Bounty Farm is a nearly three-acre sustainable farm that grows more than 12,000 pounds of fresh produce annually. Much of that harvest goes to low-income families and seniors in the community.

"The donation from the garden club is just fantastic," said Renee Hayes, another member of the UC Master Gardener Program, who has been working on the Unity Garden for a while now. "We're all volunteers, so it's very nice to be able to have a chance to buy things that might be outside the budget. It's an honor and really a privilege to be able to use that money to do some nice things at the Unity Garden for the community. It's a win-win for all of us."

The Unity Garden was initially begun in 2017 by residents living nearby in low-income housing sites, but as those residents moved on the garden became neglected and overgrown. Earlier this year, in a collaboration with Bounty Farm, local master gardeners like Hayes began tackling the weeds and cleaning up the site. They approached the Petaluma Garden Club with a request for support in turning the garden into an education site.

Sumner presented the proposal to the garden club's Giving Committee. The Committee has historically contributed to different educational opportunities in the community, like school gardens and scholarships. Sumner said she was pleased at how enthusiastic the garden club members were about the project.

"They saw how wide reaching it will be and they know us," Sumner said. "The master gardeners have given presentations over the years on various topics. So they felt very secure in thinking that we will come through. We'll follow through."

This being the 40th year of the UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County, the group has created a number of new projects, the new demo garden being just the latest.

"The \$1000 donation will help the master gardeners get the garden ready," said Sumner. explaining that \$500 going towards topsoil and \$200 going towards building cabinets for tools and materials. Another \$200 will pay for timers and pressure regulators for irrigation and \$100 will cover hoses and nozzles.

As an organization, the master gardeners have been partnering with Bounty Farm for several years.

"We've been present at their plant sales and tomato sales in the spring," said Hayes. "We're there helping to educate the public about the correct plants to plant for this climate here in Sonoma County and specifically in the surrounding area." In efforts such as this one, the master gardeners teach science based programming, soil and plant nutrition, irrigation and water conservation. "The master gardeners are really excited about having the Unity Garden as a space for us to continue education and to bring the same philosophy, the same practices that Bounty does."

According to Hayes, the educational message will stress a consciousness of integrated pest management and other important concepts.

"We make sure that we are not using any pesticides, insecticides, and so there'll be different classes on that," Hayes said. "We'll talk about composting. Definitely we'll be putting in native plants. Native plants are low water, low maintenance."

There will also be programs geared to children.

"So we want to make sure that they have access to things to smell and touch and with parents permission, to taste," she said. In addition, there will be classes designed to teach people about putting in their own gardens, emphasizing the use of plants that don't require a lot of water. There will even be classes in how to garden in confined spaces.

"A lot of people don't have a lot of space," Hayes pointed out, "so we'll be doing container gardening classes about planting in a wine barrel or a galvanized tub, whether you plant something to attract bees or other good insects or you plant, you know, one tomato plant."

Grady said she looks forward to showing the Garden Club how their grant will bear fruit, literally and figuratively, in the future.

"The garden club has been a long time supporter of Bounty Farm," she said. "It's my hope that they see how their funds will be utilized for years to come in re-igniting this garden and also funding this ongoing burgeoning collaboration."