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Boom!

Boomers & Beyond

Garden therapy

How plants help patients heal at Legacy's therapeutic gardens

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Gardens of healing

Therapeutic gardens help renew the body and spirit at Legacy Health System

By JANIE NAFSINGER
BOOM! editor

Pat McKenzie rolls her wheelchair alongside a raised bed of herbs, plucks a sprig of thyme and holds it to her nose. She closes her eyes and takes in the fragrance, a smile lighting her face as she sings a line from the song “Scarborough Fair”: “Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme ...”

Sister Pat, as she likes to be called — she’s a nun who lives at St. Ignatius Parish in Southeast Portland — visits the Stenzel Healing Garden at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital as often as she can as part of the therapy she is receiving for a spinal cord injury.

At least every other day she leaves her room to visit this quiet oasis outside the lobby of the Northwest Portland hospital. She might water some of the plants or run a rake through a garden bed. Sometimes she takes a flower cutting back to her hospital room.

A garden “quiets your anxieties, your doubts, your fears,” Sister Pat says. “It kind of puts you in another world. You don’t think about your pain, your disability, the possibility you’ll never walk again.

“Wherever I go, I find a plant, and I’m happy.”

The power of plants

Though healing gardens have been around since ancient times, horticultural therapy — the treatment of patients with gardening activities led by trained therapists — is “a young profession that continues to develop,” says Teresa Hazen, Legacy’s registered horticultural therapist.

The history of horticultural therapy in the United States dates back to World War II, when returning soldiers suffering from physical and psychological disorders were referred to greenhouse programs and outdoor gardening, Hazen says. “Outdoor gardening has been used in psychiatric programs since the early 1800s,” she adds.

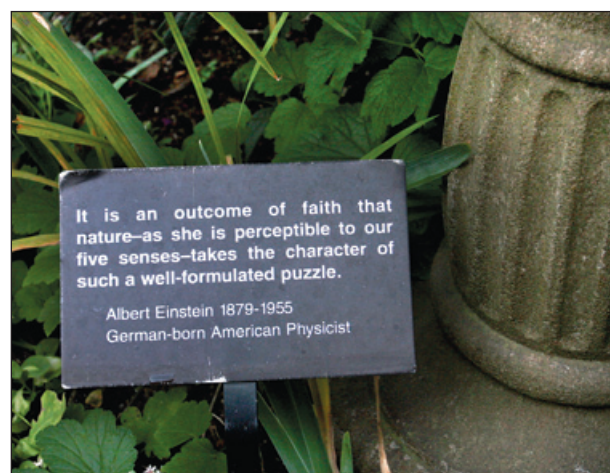
The American Horticulture Therapy Association was founded in 1973, and its Northwest chapter was established in the early 1990s. As coordinator of Legacy’s horticulture therapy program, she also oversees all nine Legacy therapeutic gardens at several medical centers, trains and supervises the garden volunteers, and leads rehab therapy groups for Legacy patients.

Gardening benefits the body, mind and spirit in dozens of ways, Hazen says. It exercises the hands, fingers and arms, builds stamina and coordination, and pleases the senses. It exercises attention span and stimulates understanding of such abstract concepts as time, growth, death and change. It motivates people to work cooperatively and fosters social activities such as garden clubs. It builds self-esteem and lifts the spirits.

“We need to use it in every special-education class and senior center in the country,” says Hazen, 61, a Vancouver, Wash., resident who taught special education in Seattle before becoming a horticulture therapist, the first in the Portland area. She joined Legacy in 1991 and later earned a gerontology certificate.

“Our objective is to keep people engaged,” she says. “Every one of our seniors needs to be outdoors. Doctors

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The Stenzel Healing Garden at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital is open to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

photos by
JIM CLARK/
Pamplin Media
Group



Teresa Hazen, horticultural therapist with Legacy Health System, works with patient Pat McKenzie in the Stenzel Healing Garden at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital in Northwest Portland. Horticultural therapy is part of McKenzie’s therapy as she undergoes rehabilitation for a spinal cord injury.

GARDENS

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tell us we need exposure to sunshine every day, and studies show how our mood improves in light.”

At Good Samaritan, Hazen works with patients recovering from stroke, brain injuries and motor vehicle accidents, patients coping with Parkinson’s disease or multiple sclerosis and those with Alzheimer’s disease. Horticulture therapy takes place in the Stenzel Healing Garden or at the hospital’s “indoor garden” — a table around which patients gather for tabletop gardening activities. They have started plants from cuttings, planted paper whites (a narcissus species) to take home and studied African violets.

“They’re just so amazed they can be sitting in the hospital doing gardening,” Hazen says.

The patients also appreciate the opportunity to focus on something other than the reason they’re in the hospital, she says. “It’s kind of nice to retrieve your successes after so much talk about what doesn’t work.”

During therapy with Alzheimer’s patients, “the goal is seasonal orientation,” she says. They might not remember what day or month it is, so the therapy incorporates objects representing the seasons — leaves and apples during autumn, for example. Hazen keeps the activities simple: “Passing a flower around the table exercises range of motion, paying attention, following directions and being social,” she says.

A blossoming new field

Horticultural therapy began requiring college training in 2008, Hazen says. That year, Legacy Health System entered a partnership with Portland Community College’s gerontology program to offer hor-

ticulture therapy courses and certification. Hazen, on top of her other jobs, teaches all the classes in the 18-month program.

Lynne Cook, a PCC gerontology student, began taking the horticulture therapy classes this past summer. The 55-year-old Beaverton resident worked as a computer analyst for 31 years before deciding she wanted a new career.

“I don’t want to code anymore; I want to work with people,” Cook says. “I’ve always loved plants and the outdoors. I knew I wanted to go into healthy programs.”

After earning her certification, Cook will look for a job in a setting where she can work with patients, “where I can help people be better.”

‘Gardening into our 100s’

Dorothy Hancock, a Southeast Portland resident recovering from a stroke, also has made horticultural therapy part of her rehabilitation at Good Samaritan.

“I enjoy every bit of this therapy,” Hancock says. “I like the quiet of gardening and the fresh air. It’s relaxing, being in the elements.”

She and Pat McKenzie both are gardeners, so Hazen suggests ways they can adapt their gardening practices to their physical abilities. Planting raised beds, for example — and planting smaller gardens.

“Instead of 25 tomato plants,” Hazen asks the two patients, “how many are enough?”

Hancock and McKenzie consider for a moment. “Three,” they agree.

“How many zucchini plants?” Hazen asks.

“One plant,” Hancock replies.

Hazen nods. “You’ve got to work smarter, not harder,” she says.

“To keep gardening into our 80s, 90s and 100s, we need to adapt, following the cycles of nature,” she adds. “This nature stuff works.”



TOP: Teresia Hazen tends to plants in Legacy Good Samaritan’s indoor garden, where horticultural therapy sessions also take place.



ABOVE: Dr. Gary Monzon, M.D., naps during a break in the Stenzel Healing Garden at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital in Northwest Portland.

LEFT: Good Samaritan’s Stenzel Healing Garden attracts such wildlife as bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

Sue Stegmiller, a retired mental health professional, volunteers at the Stenzel Healing Garden at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital.

contributed photo



Volunteer at a Legacy therapeutic garden

Legacy Health’s therapeutic gardens rely on volunteers for a variety of projects and tasks, including garden maintenance and watering, planting projects, fund development, public relations, obtaining supplies, computer work, scheduling volunteers and assisting with workshop trainings.

Two of Legacy’s nine therapeutic gardens will hold information meetings in the coming months for prospective volunteers. Pre-registration is required. Attendees will tour the

garden, learn about the requirements for the volunteer program and have their questions answered. Individual appointments for interviews, volunteer applications and training will take place later.

The following information session will be held at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital in Northwest Portland:

- Monday, Nov. 15, 10 to 11 a.m.

Call the Good Samaritan Hospital Volunteer Office at 503-413-7012 to let the hospital know you plan to attend

and to obtain the meeting location.

The following information sessions are scheduled at Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center in Gresham:

- Tuesday, Nov. 16, 10 to 11 a.m.
- Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2011, 9 to 10 a.m.

- Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2011, 11 a.m. to noon.

Call the Mount Hood Medical Center Volunteer Office at 503-674-1217 to schedule a session and obtain the meeting location.