

Vegetables for the Body and Soul



Spotlight on Crestwood: Vegetables for the Body and Soul

There is a surprise around every corner at Crestwood – even when you think you’ve been around all the corners! Did you know we are growing vegetables for Food Chain Lex?

When I was taking pictures of our peace pole in the little garden off the north breezeway a few weeks ago, the door slipped closed behind me, locking me out of the church. There was nothing to do but wander around through the back of the property hoping to find my way out.

It was quite a surprise to find two raised beds filled with tomato plants out of sight of just about everything! How in the world did they get there and what was the story behind them? After I escaped and found my way back, Jim Cristi, facilities manager, headed me to John Gretz.

I caught up with John after church recently, and he took me to visit his gardens. “You know there are five,” he said as we headed outside. And sure enough, around the corner and somewhat behind the mission center there are three more beds. Those sport tomatoes, pole beans, squash and corn. John is trying the pole beans and corn this year for the first time. I’m not sure the corn is going to make it knee-high by the Fourth of July as the song goes, but it will be close.

What is amazing is that this project has been going on for about twenty years! John said it began before his involvement. He believes Virginia Long was the leader of the group that included Phyllis Warren, Judy Royse, and Tony Shartle. There were more involved, John said, but he could not remember the names from so long ago, so apologies to those who worked hard but are not acknowledged. At first, John explained, the group went to Beaumont Presbyterian on Clays Mill Rd. where the church offered their land for community gardening at \$25 a plot. The Crestwood group rented a plot and raised tomatoes for organizations feeding the hungry. After about five or six years, they realized we had deserted raised beds at Crestwood and started growing the vegetables on our own property.

The first raised beds used were built by Crestwood children as part of a Vacation Bible School Project. When taken over by the gardening bunch, the beds had become neglected

and over-grown. In a while, John became involved, and he and Ward Ransdell took apart a bench on our campus that was falling down and rebuilt it into another garden bed. Lastly, they recycled a deserted sandbox near the Child Care Center. They took the old plastic boards and built the two elevated beds that are outside the little private garden entrance.

Age and time sorted out most of the faithful gardening volunteers, but John has plugged along mostly by himself. Karen Blakeman pitched in this year by growing tomato plants by seed for the project. Most are thriving, but when some died, John put out a handful of corn seed which led to the current corn success and added pole beans to the mix. Fifty-seven plants were started for the vegetable garden.

Seeing that watering is my most dreaded gardening task, I am especially impressed that John comes to the church every other day to water his vegetables. Even in this terribly hot weather, they are looking perky and green.

In the past, John has given the vegetables to several different agencies, mostly God's Pantry. All of the agencies appreciated the gifts. But uncertain and varying hours were frustrating, so now he has settled on Food Chain Lex on Sixth St. He says they are always open, very grateful for the fresh vegetables. You might want to look at their website. They offer meals daily and offer cooking classes to their clients using fresh vegetables in the lessons, possibly some from the Crestwood gardens.

I am struck by all the good that is going on at Crestwood without fanfare or recognition. John labors on with our vegetable gifts, but others like Karen and Ward lend their help as well. I have found that every Spotlight subject I've covered encompasses inspiration and hidden stories of quiet goodness. How appropriate that the topic of this year's Vacation Bible School is Fruits of the Spirit. Pieces of our spirit are growing tall and green right behind our church.

If you have any information to share about the Peace Poles or the Crestwood Shalom committee, please let me know. Gaye Holman gdholman@bellsouth.net.



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