

New Walla Walla garden to fuel Meals on Wheels for local seniors

Loryn Kykendall Walla Walla Union-Bulletin
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Community volunteers planted starts in three new raised garden beds in Jefferson Park near the Walla Walla Senior Center on Saturday, April 1. Photo courtesy of Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley

Three new garden beds at Jefferson Park in Walla Walla will provide fresh fruit and vegetables for local seniors.

Food grown in the gardens will be used in meals at the Walla Walla Senior Center located near Jefferson Park on Sprague Street. Garden produce will also be used for Meals on Wheels.

“The senior center kitchen, which does the Meals on Wheels program and the congregate dining, is now thankfully back after long COVID delays,” said Erendira Cruz, executive director of the Sustainable Living Center. “It’s exciting to think of what they can do with a bunch of nice, good-quality produce right outside the kitchen door.”

The garden is a collaborative project between the Sustainable Living Center, the Blue Zones Project and Pacific Power.

The project aims to increase seniors’ fruit and vegetable consumption, lower stress, promote physical activity, limit social isolation and build civic pride. Community volunteers worked in the garden Saturday, April 1. They’ll put out starts later this spring.

“There’s such a sense of purpose that comes from working in the gardens,” Cruz said. “And a lot of the senior center people can rally around something that gives them pride.”

The Sustainable Living Center received a \$3,000 grant from Pacific Power and a \$4,000 grant from the George T. Welch Foundation through Baker Boyer Bank, both going toward the garden project.

“Pacific Power is really proud to support the Sustainable Living Center,” said Brandon Zero with Pacific Power. “We think it’s really going to go a long way since it’s at a great nexus and helping seniors with socialization, physical activity and having nutritious food.”

Cruz said this is only the first phase of the project.

“We want to make sure that the initial gardens phase works out great for everyone, and eventually in phase two we envision a community garden project,” she said.

According to a recent press release, phase two is expected to include additional beds for the rest of the community to use, a seating area and possibly a little free library or pantry.

Emily Brown, a policy advocate with the Blue Zones Project, said the senior center is becoming a Blue Zones-approved organization. Blue Zones, a nonprofit that has sold public health policy guidelines to communities around the country, began a community needs assessment in 2021 to identify the top health challenges in the Walla Walla Valley.

In June, a celebration is planned to recognize the senior center’s achievement along with the grand opening of the garden.

“By that point, we hope it will have been planted and there will be volunteers who have already been building pride and working in the garden, and there will be something to show and something really beautiful to look at,” Brown said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story has been updated to correct the spelling of Erendira Cruz's first name and note that starts will be planted later this spring.

Loryn Kykendall reports on health care and education. She can be reached at lkykendall@wwub.com.

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