Happy New Year from the Mercy Garden

The holidays are a time of celebration, for the giving and receiving of gifts and for spending time with friends and family. In the Mercy Garden, however, we have the honor of giving and receiving gifts year round. We wish to thank all of you for your support and many gifts: of time, of money, of materials, and of your constant moral support. Because of you and your support, the Mercy Garden has been able to give many more gifts than simply growing food for the needy. As you will see below, we are growing community. We are growing leadership. We are growing careers, and so much more.

2014: A Year of Growth

Thanks to financial contributions from the Ademas Foundation as well as staff, faculty, and alumni donors, we were able to purchase all of the materials needed to complete the thirty 4- by 8-foot raised beds that we will use for growing vegetables.

These beds were constructed in large part through the hard work of the GCU men’s basketball players and coaches, who joined us in the garden for numerous service events, combined with leadership training, and group-building activities.

From those beds, we were able to make weekly harvests of fresh vegetables, which were delivered to Providence House and the Brick Visitation Relief Center.

2014 Milestones

Completed raised beds for vegetable production.

Produced many pounds of fresh veggies, which were donated to Providence House and the Brick Visitation Relief Center to help feed needy families in our area.

Honored with an award from the men’s basketball team.

Received $1,000 grant from Scotts to support organic gardens

Provided numerous service opportunities for GCU students

Hosted biweekly classes for students from the Schroth School and the Lehmann School over the summer.

Hosted classes for GCU’s Biological Diversity and Introductory Biology courses.

Harvested produce on its way to Providence House
Students also helped with the expansion and management of the perennial native pollinator beds. After removing turf and preparing the plots, student volunteers planted seeds and gift plants, including some gifted to us from the Lifetime Assistance for Developmental and Challenging Individual Needs (LADACIN) Network, whose students and aides from the Schroth and Lehmann schools also participated in the plantings. Students and many faculty and alumni volunteers worked to keep these beds weeded and mulched throughout the year.

As well as creating a colorful and fragrant display of flowers for our human visitors, these flowers were used extensively for feeding by both butterflies and humming birds. Later in the season, these plants also provided seeds for fueling many songbirds on their fall migration.

Another big project that was completed this summer was the construction and installation of adjustable-height work tables for use by students in the LADACIN Network. These tables have surfaces that can be raised for arts and crafts activities, potting, or drawing and lowered when working with water container gardens and other larger items. This year, we plan to build an arbor and trellis over this area to provide shade for the area below to keep those working in this studio cooler.

**Learning and Service**

A number of classes used the garden this summer, including the Biological Diversity class that visited the garden often to study its plants and animals. The Human Biology class also conducted a lab in the garden, which involved learning about nutrition and how that relates to the food they eat. Beyond participating in learning for their classes, all students also assisted in the garden in some way.

Numerous students have been involved with service learning projects in the garden this year, including students from Dr. Brunella Bowditch’s Biological Diversity class and Rich Mohr’s Integrated Science class. Students from biology, art, and education also helped with creating and providing learning experiences for the LADACIN Network students.

Partnering with biology and art students, GCU education students created a variety of learning experiences around the plants and animals in the garden and used the crops to teach about healthy nutrition. In addition, one pre-physical therapy student had the opportunity to shadow and work with the physical therapist accompanying these students on their visits. In reflecting on this experience, the students wrote about how meaningful this experience was for them.

“The first day in the garden, we worked with special needs students,” wrote one GCU student. “We got to pick some flowers and explain the different types of flowers, seeds, and colors. This was an awesome experience because I want to become a teacher, and it was good practice for me. I also got to meet some pretty incredible children.”

Another wrote:
Coming into this, I disliked gardening and had no prior experience. Leaving, I can honestly say that I have learned a lot, and I now enjoy working in a garden. Having no previous experience allowed me to figure things out on my own and feel around the garden to really look to see what needed to be done. Knowing that the school I attend is so influential in the surrounding community is so nice. These vegetables that are growing and being tended to on campus are being delivered to those in need, and that is a great thing. A little gesture can go a long way, and it all starts with one seed.
The garden has been blessed this year by support in many forms. Several athletic teams, especially the men’s basketball team, as well as students and staff from TRIO-Student Support Services and numerous faculty, staff, student and alumni volunteers donated their time and physical labor. The Ademas Foundation; the GCU Alumni Association; and many individual alumni, faculty, staff, and students donated money for materials and plants. To all of these, we offer our humble, yet profound gratitude. We truly could not do any of this without you. Most notable of all is the donation of time, expertise, and vision of our garden coordinator, Rich Mohr. Rich’s leadership is pivotal to all that the garden has achieved and the amazing learning experiences of those who participate in the activities happening there.

Moving Forward

Now that the vegetable beds are finished, we plan to move forward on several fronts.

- Continue to grow produce for donation to local charities.
- Purchase and install the main gates and the two side gates.
- Complete the benches for the outdoor classroom.
- Develop and maintain healthy composting practices.
- Continue to build the pollinator garden.
- Install a water feature (pond and stream) with a solar-driven pump that will allow us to add wetland plants to the pollinator garden.
- Partner with professors and students from a wider range of classes as a continuing goal.
- Explore opportunities for involving business (marketing) and communication students in the garden in a variety of ways.

Opportunities for Future Support

As always, financial donations, large and small, are much needed to buy plants and other materials for all of our projects. We would also appreciate help from people with carpentry expertise for the construction of benches, the studio, and other similar projects. We are also looking for someone with composting expertise to lead that project. However, our single greatest need is for salary for the garden coordinator (Rich Mohr). We would appreciate hearing from anyone with leads for grants or other funding sources suited to this purpose. Please e-mail Dr. Louise Wootton at WoottonL@georgian.edu.