

**St. Matthew's  
Lakefront  
ElderGarten  
A Senior  
Community  
Garden**



# BACKGROUND

- The ElderGarten is a senior community garden consisting of 40 raised beds of various shapes and sizes that are reserved for those 55 or older. The beds are rented for a nominal seasonal fee between May and October each year. The ElderGarten is located in downtown Kenosha on a formerly vacant plot of land that occupies over an acre of land extending from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues between 58<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> Streets. It is just south of Lakeside Towers and west of the Southport Marina. The property is owned by St. Matthew's Episcopal Church and the ElderGarten is managed through Church outreach by a group of local volunteers who have an interest in gardening and in serving seniors.

# **BOARD & VOLUNTEERS**

The Board is largely responsible for supporting the gardeners while also developing and maintaining the rest of the site. Watering is provided for those unable to lift watering cans and other assistance is available upon request. The Board consists of 9 individuals some retired and some still in the workforce bringing diverse backgrounds such as human service workers, educators, and a landscape architect that designed the site.

A small but faithful group of volunteers assist in keep the garden going. The Board is actively recruiting more volunteers. At the same time, we hope to garner more community interest and support. We have forged a few collaborative relationships with schools and civic organizations and have applied for and been awarded several grants to supplement ongoing improvements and meet operating costs.

# MISSION & HISTORY

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- MISSION STATEMENT “To be the premier raised bed community garden for seniors age 55 and over, promoting health through gardening and social interaction in parklike setting.” The ElderGarten has been under development since 2015 and is entering its 5<sup>th</sup> growing season. St. Matthew’s Church was approached regarding the use of the vacant property the Church owns and it was learned that the land was deeded for the use and benefit of seniors. The Church agreed that the idea of a community garden for seniors was a good fit. The site was cleared, and funds were raised for the purchase and installation of beds of wood and corrugated steel. The beds were quickly rented, and it became apparent more were needed. A 2<sup>nd</sup> row was installed and the ElderGarten maintains a waiting list. A custom shed was added along with planting beds, rain and pollinator gardens, and a small orchard all surrounded by a hedgerow of native shrubs that are underplanted with fruits and herbs. We have a council circle around one of our large trees with chairs painted by local artists and 2 Little Free Library’s (Adult & Children) that were built and donated by Harborside Academy students. Once the vegetable garden was established, development began on the more public east end to add a food forest and art features.

# RAISED BED VEGETABLE GARDENS

- There are 40 raised beds available for rent including 4X8, 4X4, and 2X6. Gardeners are responsible for the purchase of their own plants, but seeds and seedlings are made available when donated. Water is provided by a fire hydrant and purchased from the City. Water is stored in a 500-gallon raised tank for hand watering although volunteers' water the beds for those who have requested help with watering. There are 3 benches anchored with planters that were donated through an Eagle Scout project. The city donated 5 picnic tables. Harborside HS donated a vegetable stand for centralizing access food to be made available to anyone.

# POLLINATOR BEDS & RAIN GARDENS

- These beds are planted with native sedges and wildflowers designed to attract and support bees, birds, and other pollinators. The rain gardens are meant to hold storm water on the site. A rain barrel by the shed collects another 50 gallons of water. Bird baths, nesting boxes, and bee hotels are set in place. Various native trees and shrubs are scattered around the site to provide food and habitat. (Keep in mind the property was a large plot of land with nothing growing on it except grass).

# THE ORCHARD & SHRUB ROW- HERB BEDS

- A donation of 6 apple, 3 pear, and 2 plum trees was made that will one day bear fruit free for the taking. The shrub rows that will create a natural wall will also feed and shelter birds and other wildlife. These are underplanted with donated herbs including rosemary, sage, oregano, lavender, as well as strawberries and rhubarb.

# THE FOOD FOREST

- Another interesting feature that is under development. It is meant to be a self-sustaining food source in layers consisting of fruiting trees, berry producing shrubs, vines, elderberry, wild strawberries, and ginger. Nearly 100 new plants are to put in this spring in collaboration with GTC.





## THE NEST & WAVES

- An artist created an art feature called “THE NEST” that is made of branches and whips to form a seating area. It has become a topic of conversation and popular destination while visiting. Small solar lights were added to create interest at night. Also added was a earthen sculpture not unlike Indian effigy mounds consisting of four long, wavelike hills.



# THE PUBLIC

- As indicated in our Mission Statement, we are creating a park like setting and the public is encouraged to visit and walk through the ElderGarten. The site is situated between downtown, and the lakefront. Our neighbors in the surrounding high-rise buildings and homes frequently visit and some garden or volunteer.

# THE PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE

- The ElderGarten has relied on community support, grants, scouts, local businesses, local artists, and individual donors since inception. The list of contributors is long including the following:
- St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
- Garland Alliance
- The Kenosha Community Foundation
- Four Seasons Garden Club
- Rotary West
- Root River Chapter of Wild Ones
- Grow Rite Landscape
- Gateway Technical Institute
- Lakeview Technology HS
- Harborside Academy
- The Boy Scouts
- Raised bed sponsors
- Volunteers



**Come watch**  
**us grow!**

