

Seniors, kids grow as one

Gardens shared at 4 city schools

BY SARA FOSS
Gazette Reporter

On a recent weekday, a team of raincoat-clad retirees spread wood chips around the raised garden beds at Schenectady's Zoller Elementary School. Some of them helped build these beds earlier this spring, and will maintain them through the summer and into the fall. Until a heavy downpour drove students indoors, they were surrounded by children.

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volunteer program called Retirees In Service to the Environment, or RISE.

One of RISE's goals is to get participants to consider volunteering with environmental groups and programs.

As part of their multiweek training, the volunteers learned about topics such as climate change, water quality and waste management. In all, there are 13 volunteers.

In an effort to teach youth in urban schools about the benefits of eating fresh produce and where fruits and vegetables come from, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schenectady County built gardens at four city elementary schools. Two of them, at William C. Keane Elementary School and Yates Magnet School, were constructed last spring, while the gardens at Zoller and Martin Luther King Magnet School were built this year.

Now, these gardens are being maintained by the RISE volunteers. Cook said she usually volunteers at Yates, and visits the school about once a week, where she is often joined by children.

"It's been satisfying and interesting to see the children blossom under one-on-one attention," she said. "Many of their parents are not familiar with fresh produce. Hopefully we can reverse that, and have the children teach their parents about fresh produce."

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

The gardens provide students with a hands-on, educational experience, said Denise Kolankowski,

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RURAL BROADBAND

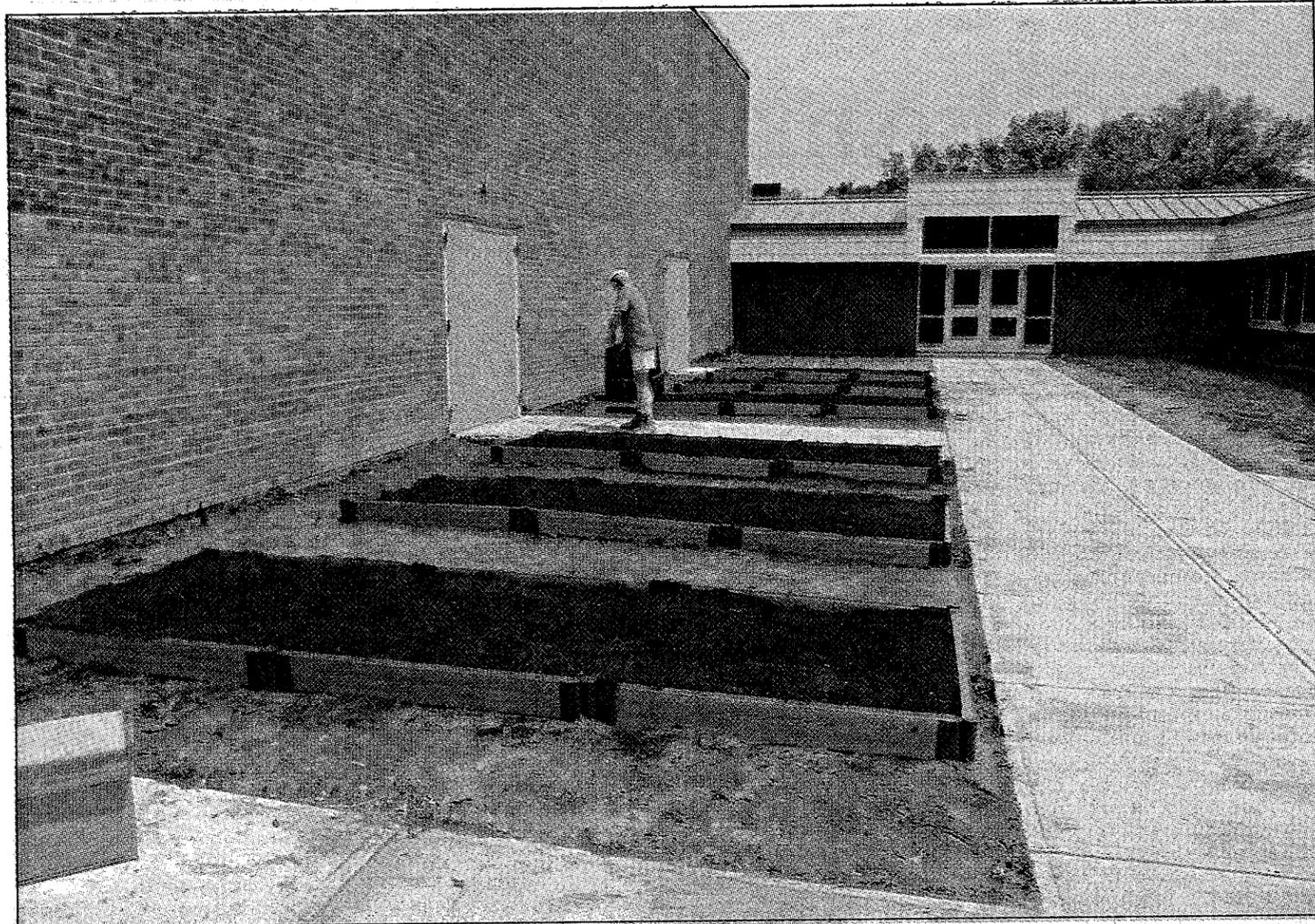
A proposed tax credit to foster high-speed Internet to rural through the state Senate. B

"The idea is to help the children get outside and see how plants grow," said Jean Cook, 81, of Rotterdam. She and her husband, Ralph, are both participating in a new Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schenectady County

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REGIONAL



Garden

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senior resource educator at Cornell Cooperative Extension.

"You can see it," she said. "You can touch it."

The gardens are part of a research project sponsored by Cornell University and Washington State University called "Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth." Goals include increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and helping create a local food system.

For Cornell, the gardens are also a source of valuable information.

The school's Department of Design and Environmental Analysis is conducting a study on the effects of school gardens on student fruit and vegetable consumption, and Kolankowski recently submitted data to Cornell drawn from observations at the four elementary schools.

The study compares fruit and vegetable consumption at the two schools whose gardens were built last year to consumption at the two schools whose gardens weren't built until this spring; photographs of the students' lunch trays were taken at all four schools, and the students also maintained journals about what they were eating. Though students in all four schools received planting lessons, students at Keane and Yates were given additional lessons on nutrition, plants and the importance of growing food. They also discussed gardening and helped build the gardens.

RESEARCH ON RETENTION

Kolankowski said the students at Yates and Keane remembered more of what they were taught about gardening than the students at Zoller and MLK, which lacked gardens last year.

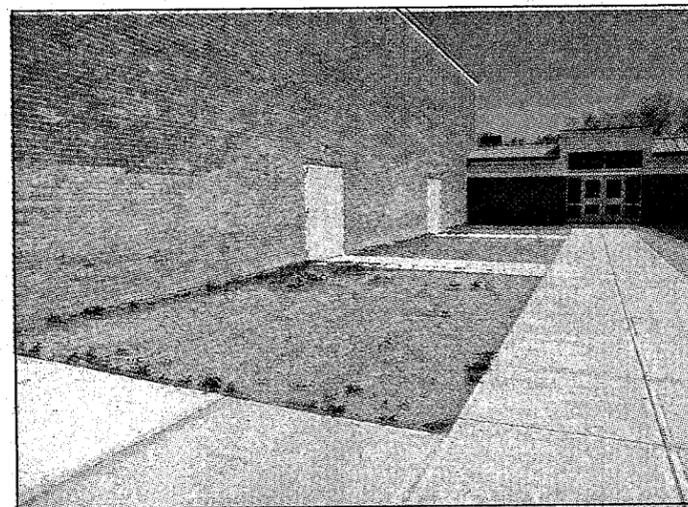
"At Yates and Keane, there was more retention," she said. "They recalled. They were able to answer questions."

The research focused on students who were in second and fourth grades last year, and are in third and fifth grades this year. Most of the students did not have gardening experience, although



These photos show the progression of the raised garden bed project at Schenectady's Zoller Elementary School. The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schenectady County built gardens at four city elementary schools. Two of them, at William C. Keane Elementary School and Yates Magnet School, were constructed last spring, while the gardens at Zoller and Martin Luther King Magnet School were built this year.

PHOTOS PROVIDED



some of them had gardened with grandparents, Kolankowski said.

Cornell Cooperative Extension's funding for the garden program ends this year, and Kolankowski hopes teachers who feel especially committed to the gardens will keep them going.

"This fall is the transition," she said.

Kolankowski said RISE volunteers were instrumental in getting this year's gardens built and planted. "They did it all in two weeks," she said. RISE volunteers are ex-

perienced gardeners. "All of these people do some type of gardening at home," she said.

Kolankowski said the garden produce will be donated to groups and individuals within the community, noting that Martin Luther King Magnet School has a plan to give its harvest to the Schenectady Inner City Ministry.

Kolankowski said she hopes the RISE volunteers will continue to seek out environmental projects in the area.

Nancy Peterson, one of the RISE

volunteers at Zoller, said she wants get involved with initiatives to increase recycling in the city of Schenectady.

"I love gardening, but I think recycling is very important," said Peterson, 71, of Schenectady. She said she's enjoyed working with the students at Zoller. "It's a lot more exciting with the kids out here," she said.

Reach Gazette reporter Sara Foss at 395-3193 or sfoss@dailygazette.net.