

Heavenly Garden, Earthly Pursuits

by Doreen Fitzgerald

Over 30,000 people come each year to enjoy the work of the small staff and 300 volunteers who make the garden bloom at the Fairbanks Experiment Farm. Although based on research and horticulture demonstration projects, the Georgeson Botanical Garden (GBG) is in many ways a community project and asset—ideas and information for home gardeners, inspiration for artists, natural dyes for local spinners and weavers, lunch break setting and backdrop for weddings.

With the arrival of spring this year, work began at GBG on a special space for children, a three-year construction project funded by a gift from Walter and Marita Babula. Last year the Babulas met with GBG director Pat Holloway and experiment farm staff members to discuss the possibility of a children's garden. "Because their enthusiasm for the project was great," Walter Babula said, "we worked out theme, timing, and cost." A Fairbanks orthodontist, he has treated local children for thirty years. "We decided that now we'd like to do something special for the kids and positive for the community," he said. Walter started gardening as a child in Pennsylvania, made a home garden when he moved to Fairbanks, and became a master gardener through the Cooperative Extension Service. He and Marita created and help maintain a garden near his workplace, at the Denali Center long-term care facility.

The Babula Children's Garden will be a delightful mix of whimsy and learning opportunities: pioneer garden, native plants, water and weather features, willow tunnel, maze, and more. UAF staff and volunteers will complete some of the projects, while others will be contracted. Design of the interactive stream, tree house, and a composting toilet facility was adopted as a senior design project by UAF engineering students.



31

Support for the garden by the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station is augmented by volunteer labor, paid garden memberships, an annual plant sale, a gift shop, individual gifts, and fundraising events for special projects. Under construction now is a picnic shelter, gift of the College Rotary Club. Another project is a roof for the garden's Jim Drew amphitheater. To raise funds for engineering and construction, the UAF College of Fellows sponsors a summer fundraiser, "Goodies in the Garden." Along with desserts, the July event features garden experts, hayrides, and door prizes. The College of Fellows is a group of university advocates that support university fundraising and public relations efforts.

Other work at the garden includes maintaining plant specimens, conducting trials of vegetable and flower varieties, demonstration of growing techniques, and research on characteristics of native plants. Dr. Holloway was instrumental in creating the botanical garden and oversees its development. She is a professor of horticulture with the Department of Plant, Animal, and Soil Sciences in the School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences.



Above: sunflower in the Georgeson Botanical Garden.

Left: Around fifty Rotary International foreign exchange students met their community service requirement by helping with chores at the garden this spring.

—PHOTOS BY DOREEN FITZGERALD, AFES PUBLICATIONS OFFICE



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Clockwise from above:

Beets grown at Calypso Farm and Ecology Center, founded by SNRAS graduate Susan Willsrud and her husband, Tom Zimmer.

—PHOTO COURTESY CALYPSO FARM & ECOLOGY CENTER

Historic photo of reindeer racing at the annual reindeer fairs on the Seward Peninsula, held during the 1920s and 1930s. This image appears in Reindeer Roundup! A K-12 Educator's Guide to Reindeer in Alaska, published recently by the Reindeer Research Program, SNRAS.

—HISTORIC PHOTO FROM *WHERE DID REINDEER COME FROM?* BY ALICE POSTELL, PUBLISHED IN 1990.

Northern fur seals sunning themselves in Resurrection Bay, 2004.

—PHOTO BY NORMAN R. HARRIS