

Meridian Township Safety Gardens Project
Fire and Police Gardens
May 18, 2019

Initial Idea and Planning: In the Fall of 2018, the Meridian Township Police Department approached the Meridian Garden Club to ask for their assistance to uplift the outside of their building by adding a garden. The MGC brainstormed the idea during their September meeting. To incorporate the youth from the Meridian Township schools was heavily endorsed by the membership. Some members also brought to attention that the Fire Station could also use the uplift. The thought of getting the youth involved in a community service project made this project appear more plausible.

From that point on, the MGC began to reach out to local school districts to recruit volunteers for the project, which they planned would take place sometime in May. The Youth Education Committee within the MGC, (Simar Pawar, Melody Potter and Georgia Styka), contacted both superintendents of Haslett and Okemos School Districts, discussing the event's basic details and their mission for the volunteers. With the superintendents' encouragement, both schools' athletic directors and varsity football coaches were further contacted with the event's information. The event was open to all students and student athletes from both school districts and any parents to contribute their time and effort to an important part of their community.

Haslett: Considering the high number of volunteers needed for the project, during the 2019 Spring Break the MGC approached varsity head coach Charlie Otlewski seeking commitment from his players. The coach's enthusiasm toward the project led the MGC to start planning the preliminary landscape design, budgeting, site preparation, general permissions and purchasing materials etc.

Haslett High School was very well represented by the members of the football program (players, head coach and assistant and conditioning coaches) and student athletes from other various sports. A few Haslett alumni also took the time to come out and serve the community. The Haslett team prepped, planted, mulched the police gardens and finished the task by cleaning up the site. They also managed to squeeze in weeding and mulching the farmhouse gardens, mulching the Okemos Post Office and stopping by to help finish the Fire Station.

Okemos: From Okemos High School, ACTION, Okemos football program and members from the hockey and tennis teams were upholding the Chieftain pride. Varsity football head coach Mike Krumm set precedent by giving his players the responsibility for the signing up and communicating with the MGC. Okemos player, Rovic Ines, took the initiative to coordinate with his team and the MGC. Aparna Krishnamurthy was the coordinator on the behalf of ACTION. The athletic team volunteers took on the Fire Station, while the ACTION members set up camp at the Chapel and Gazebo. ACTION planted and mulched both Chapel gardens and bravely weeded the gazebo area. The student athletes completely weeded, pruned, planted and mulched the fire station gardens.

The work ethic and dedication displayed by the volunteers for this project is commendable and is a testament to their upbringing. Working alongside the young volunteers was an invigorating experience that entrusted hope for the future.

Fire and Police Department: The Fire and Police Chief (Mike Hamel and Ken Plaga) and their staffs collaborated with the student athletes at their respective buildings to enhance a positive interaction between the two parties. This project's main mission was to show the youth the importance of community pride and service, with the servicemen leading by example.

The fire and police service unions joined MGC in providing refreshments for the volunteers.

Behind the Project: This project would have not been possible without the Capital Area Master Gardeners for their donation and MGC's budgetary allowance.

The Design and Landscaping team (Tressa McAllister, Miriam Minshall and Dick Von Tersch) worked tirelessly to design garden plans, mark the flower beds, research and obtain plants. MGC's fearless leader Georgia Styka coordinated with the Meridian Township arranging for MISDIG markings, extending irrigation, adding mulch, soil and Dairy Doo.

District II B youth group coordinator, Ronnie Dush, was available to guide the volunteers. Mr. Lee "Buzzy" McAllister was seen working long after the volunteers had left, picking up around the trees and cleaning up the site once everything was done. Sue Wittick helped by taking pictures of the event.

The MGC volunteers who served as guides (Carol Armstrong, Kris Belonge, Nita Campbell, Colleen Hyslop, Lee and Tressa McAllister, Miriam Minshall, Linda Mogyoros, Simar Pawar, Melody Potter, Georgia Styka and Dick VonTersch) were the backbone of the project. They helped to explain the fundamentals of preparing and planting, basics of mulching and future care of the gardens to the student athletes. Dick VonTersch gave an elaborative demonstration on the proper techniques for planting. Each member of the team was instrumental in the creation and layout of the Fire and Police gardens.

Strength in Numbers: This project would have not been possible without the great turnout of volunteers. More than 60 students and 20 adults volunteered. "Many hands make light work" was the statement of the project. Literally, mountains were moved in a three-hour time. Regardless of the volunteers jam packed weekend (prom and senior party), it was a true inspiration to see the good humor, hard work and determination of all involved to see the project through.