

# St. Stephen Parish is 'Growing the Neighborhood'

By Jerri Donohue

Cleveland

The centerpiece of St. Stephen's Growing the Neighborhood project, a 1940's era greenhouse, won't be fully restored until the fall. But the parish on Cleveland's West 54th Street is already planting seeds of friendship its Detroit-Shoreway community.

Parishioner and project coordinator Diane Beargie said the Society of St. Stephen, which promotes and preserves the parish's history and artistic treasures, values the parish's traditional role.

"The church was once the cornerstone of the neighborhood," Beargie said. Determined to make their parish a greater presence in the area.

St. Stephen's Society members identified free gardening classes for adults and children as a way to nurture the neighborhood. The parish currently permits Ithaca Court Community Gardeners to cultivate church owned property, and the Society realized the parish's va-



Children played "pin the center on the sunflower" during the St. Stephen Parish plant swap events.

cant greenhouse also afforded numerous possibilities for benefitting local folks of all ages.

Dubbing its project "Growing the Neighborhood," the Society presented a proposal to the Cleveland Foundation's Neighborhood Connections program. "Growing the Neighborhood" recently received a \$3200 grant to cover supplies for programming and youth mentoring and to buy the potting benches and potting sink essential to the greenhouse.

Enthusiasm for the project spread. St. Stephen's Golf Outing purchased the greenhouse roof's automated vent opening system and St. Stephen School's alumni association promised financial support for other necessities. An electrician offered his labor at no charge. Masons, too, volunteered their expertise. For non-technical aspects of the project, helpers from Cub Scout Pack 109 are racking up hours toward their service badges.

When completed, the 13-foot by 18-foot greenhouse will include potting



WILLIAM RIETER

Cub Scout troop volunteers helped with the plant swap event at St. Stephen Parish and will help with the parish's Growing the Neighborhood program.

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benches, a worm compost bin, stations equipped for both water and sand propagation, and space for gardening under lights.

During the restoration, parish junior and senior high students are being mentored in carpentry, painting and basic plumbing. Later they will use these skills to make small repairs for elderly neighborhood residents. Youth group members will also construct and distribute window boxes and prepare materials for some of the children's programs, such as building simple mason bee houses.

Growing the Neighborhood launched its free gardening classes for adults on June 15 in the parish Club Room with a practical presentation by Mark Didonato on uses of mulch, manure and compost.

In coming months, Julio Castro, a parishioner employed by the Rockefeller Greenhouse, and other horticulture experts will provide budget-friendly tips on topics like cultivating potatoes and easy ways to beautify the yard. A major goal of the project is to help neighbors forge bonds, and so participants become better acquainted over coffee and refreshments after each session.

One Saturday a month, Growing the Neighborhood offers a program for school age children. Seasonal subjects include making a winter bird feeder from a pinecone and a "Creepy Plants" activity around Halloween. When the project hatches butterflies in its greenhouse next spring, the kids will make butterfly feeders.

Before the school year ended, Grow-

ing the Neighborhood distributed promotional seed packets of carrots, lettuce and radishes to families of pupils at Metro Catholic School.

The neighborhood received a better sample of things to come, however, during a Plant Swap held this month. Gardeners brought healthy plants to trade, resulting in an eclectic selection ranging from lamb's ear to strawberries to climbing hydrangea. Master gardeners welcomed questions about lawn and garden problems. Attendees received information about keeping urban chickens and cultivating worms for garden use. Volunteers from Metro Catholic School busied children with challenges such as "Pin the Center on the Sunflower," a corn hole toss and a word search of gardening terms.

During the Plant Swap, 15 visitors took a guided tour of St. Stephen Parish, the building that anchored its neighborhood for decades. German immigrants built the ornate church over a century ago.

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