“Bessie” Gets a Face-Lift!

The Bessie Spaur Butterfly Garden is increasingly recognized as a garden well worth a visit. Earlier this year the garden was featured as a Regional Public Garden in ISU’s “Public Gardens of Iowa” 2012 Garden Calendar. On June 30th a large group of gardening enthusiasts will travel by bus from Omaha to tour several Marion County gardens. Their first stop? Bessie Spaur Butterfly Garden!

The garden was established in 1994 on the grounds of the Knoxville Area Community Hospital. The garden was an outgrowth of a “Trees Forever” project. Bessie Spaur, who was then living at the long-term care facility in the Knoxville Hospital, celebrated her 100th birthday during construction of the garden. Upon her death, her family donated her memorial money to the butterfly garden, which was subsequently named in her memory.

The Knoxville Federated Garden Club was founded in 1998. The new club became the sponsor of the garden, ensuring continued development. 52 plots, each 4’ by 8’, on either side of a natural waterway, are tended by volunteer gardeners under the coordination of the garden club. The club’s annual spring “Garden Gala” event raises funds to maintain the garden. Service groups also help with maintenance work. Although owned by the hospital, memorial and community donations continue to help the garden grow.

Over the course of time the natural waterway became overgrown with cattails and other invasive plants. During heavy rains, water backed up in this area and flooded the plots, destroying plantings and leaving debris making the garden unsightly. In early January 2011 Knoxville Federated Garden Club president Mary Dee Dykstra enlisted the help of Harv Sprafka to assist in efforts to correct the water-related problems and improve the aesthetics of the garden. Continued on page 2...

Save the date...Master Gardener 2013 Garden Tour Coming August 25-26!
More details next month!
Harv facilitated meetings and opened communication between club members, Knoxville hospital officials, and the Marion county Soil, Water and Conservation District (SWCD); Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); ISU Extension, Marion County, and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS).

The hospital site is within the Competine Watershed Project. The parties met regularly during 2011 to discuss possible remedies to the water problems at the hospital site. Underground and surface problems have been exacerbated by increased water run-off from hard surfacing, impervious parking areas, and a changing environment (sedimentation in the hospital’s retention pond and in the tile system in the garden).

Early in 2012 everything came together. Funding was made available for the restoration project through the office of the Marion County SWCD and a grant from the Knoxville Heritage Community Foundation. Work began last month on the natural waterway in the butterfly garden. Cattails and other invasive plants were removed, drainage was improved significantly by installing a new, bigger tile to the pond, and aesthetics were improved by adding rocks. Volunteers from the garden club and community were busy the last week of June returning the bridge at the west end of the garden to its spot, planting more flowers, and weeding—all in preparation for the Omaha visitors June 30th.

Work will continue on the rest of the project throughout the summer and fall according to John Gotta, Knoxville hospital official. Crews will dredge the pond and excavate to a depth of 4’. It will eventually be rock lined with a fountain in the center. At the west end of the butterfly garden, workers will till up a 20’ x 60’ section that will be planted in native grasses, serving to slow water run-off during heavy rains. The entire project is designed to improve water quality, prevent run-off into Competine Creek, and improve the aesthetics of an increasingly popular visitor destination. Special thanks to the Knoxville Federated Garden Club led by Mary Dee Dykstra, John Gotta from the Knoxville Hospital & Clinics, and Harv Sprafka for their vision, cooperation, and hard work. If you haven’t visited the garden recently, make a date to go!

“The Green Scene” is a tip sheet developed by the Marion County Extension Office to inform people of horticulture events, problems, and interesting ideas. Let us know if you want to be added to our mailing list. Some issues are also available at www.extension.iastate.edu/marion/. This material has been prepared Karen Ackley, Agriculture Program Assistant. If you have questions, please contact the office at (641) 842-2014.

Sincerely, Dale R. Miller, County Extension Education Director