

Coalition sets roots in garden - Claudell Lane - Columbia Daily Tribune (MO) - October 22, 2000

October 22, 2000 | Columbia Daily Tribune (MO) | BRIAN C. KALLER of the Tribune's staff

It's a story that sounds too good to be true. "About 80 people around here use this garden," Robert Morrison said about the community garden on Claudell Lane. "White people, black people, Asian, Hispanic, from 4-year-olds to the elderly, all work together." Residents of Claudell Lane have used the vacant lot between 707 and 711 Claudell to grow food since the 1950s, Morrison said. So when the lot's owner wanted to sell the land, the Columbia Community Garden Coalition raised money to buy it. "This is the first garden we own now," said Morrison, vice president of the coalition. He has gardened at the Claudell site for several years. "It's really a big thing for us." At a ribbon cutting Thursday, more than two dozen neighbors and coalition members turned out with champagne and produce for the garden's dedication. Former owner Goldie Sims, now in her 80s, traveled back to her hometown from Oklahoma for the occasion. Sims, who lived in Columbia from 1935 until her retirement, said she and her husband had bought the surrounding 10 acres in 1951. One by one, developers bought the lots on Claudell - a blend of Claude's first name and Goldie's middle name, Odell - and turned their field into a subdivision. But two lots never sold, she said, and they became the neighborhood garden. The coalition had rented the 21,280 square feet of land for \$500 a year from Sims, long since retired. The coalition, begun in 1983, manages 12 to 14 gardens around Columbia each year, providing seeds, supplies and education for about 500 people who pay \$15 for a plot to grow their own food. When Sims placed the garden on the market for \$30,000 last year, the coalition raised more than \$22,000 from local donors to buy it. "Most of the people who live on that block and need the garden are extremely low-income," said Karen Graul, coalition treasurer. "So we raised the money ourselves." The coalition received a \$13,000 grant from the Heinkel Charitable Trust, a \$5,000 grant from the Boone Electric Community Trust and \$8,000 from the Boone County Community Trust. The group also raised about \$1,000 from downtown business owners, including Eldon Benus, former owner of Cafe Time, which is now Das Kaffeehaus Cafe and Deli; Richard King of The Blue Note; Susan McQuilkin of Ninth Street Deli; John Pham of Bangkok Gardens; and Annette Weaver of Columbia Books. An anonymous donor also gave \$1,000. The coalition also had a Twilight Festival booth, said Graul, and "we got donations all the way down to kids putting pennies in the jar." The group received help from Sims herself. "When she learned we were struggling to raise the money, she took it off the market until we could raise the money to buy it," Graul said. In this age, communities are often clusters of strangers living on the same block, but Morrison said the garden brings different backgrounds - including Vietnamese, Cambodian and Mexican families - together. "A garden like this makes a safer neighborhood, because it means everybody knows one another," Morrison said. "Because of the different cultures, we've gotten to try a lot of new kinds of foods we never would have heard of - long beans, lemon grass, luffa. For the elderly, it's a chance to get out and get exercise and get to know people. And we plant a row for the hungry." Mary Hendrickson of MU's Food Circle Networking Project, which includes the coalition and the Farmers Market, estimates that one of the garden's eight raised beds produces \$400 worth of food every year. Hendrickson said community gardens are an "often overlooked" part of a community. "It connects people with the food they eat," Hendrickson said. "There is a soulful aspect to it." Reach Brian C. Kaller at (573)

815-1715 or bkaller@tribmail.com."

Copyright 2000, 2003 Columbia Daily Tribune