

TheTimes

TIGARD | TUALATIN | SHERWOOD

Deacon Mimi Eick uses her green thumb to connect with kids in Tigard

A volunteer at Greenburg Oaks in Tigard stirs up interest in kids for gardening

BY KRISTEN FORBES

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Mimi Eick came on board as a volunteer at Greenburg Oaks, an apartment complex in Tigard run by Community Partners for Affordable Housing, five years ago. She was in the process of becoming ordained as a deacon and was looking for a community service project for her field experience.

She had a friend who lived at Greenburg Oaks, so she familiarized herself with the program and soon began volunteering. She became involved with CPAH's summer youth program, serving meals and assisting kids with their artwork, games, homework and more. She chaperoned field trips, tutored students in math and English and helped out with special projects.

A year before her arrival at CPAH, a group of volunteers from Intel had constructed a garden area behind one of the Greenburg Oaks buildings. Eick, who has always had a passion for gardening, volunteered to tend to the garden and teach the residents in the youth program about growing and nurturing plants and vegetables.

When vandalism in the garden surfaced, Eick realized she needed to get kids more involved and teach them to take pride in what they were growing and creating. She instructed kids in Greenburg Oaks after-school program and OAKS summer program on the ways of caring for a garden. She then collaborated with the kids to create a cookbook filled with recipes comprised of garden-grown fruits and vegetables.

The recipes came from families who lived in the complex, favorite cookbooks and the kids themselves. "Delicious Delights from OAKS Kids – A Book Inspired by our Garden" was born.

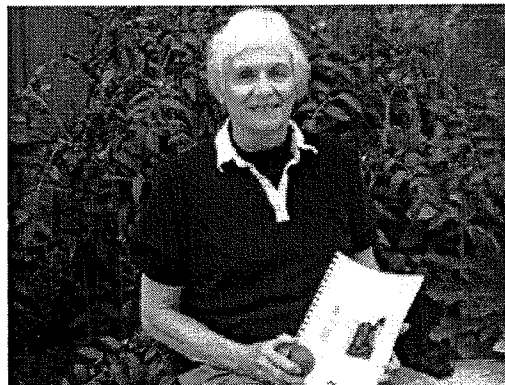
Kids in the youth program drew illustrations, and OAKS teens spent hours typing the recipes and text for the cookbook. Eick took the book to Hillsboro Quick Print, where Gary and Carol Davis offered up their creativity and resources to have 60 of the cookbooks printed for free.

Today, Eick serves as deacon of St. James Episcopal Church in Tigard and continues to be involved at CPAH, letting her vision for social justice serve as her guide.

"I am very interested in affordable housing as a social justice issue," says Eick. "And I want kids to get off to a good start in school and stay in school and have opportunities beyond schools. That's the philosophy of CPAH. It's the idea of giving everybody a leg up, giving everyone an opportunity."

She has been ordained for four years, something she wanted to do for a long time. With a full-time job at PCC and a family, Eick put off studying to become a deacon until after retirement. Eick and her husband, a physical therapist, have lived in Metzger for 35 years. Their son, who went through the Tigard-Tualatin school system and now works at the Washington Square mall, lives in Beaverton.

At a time when community gardening is flourishing, residents of Greenburg Oaks are very proud and appreciative of the garden in their complex. Eick enjoys talking to residents and finding out what the garden means to them – like one resident who says the sunflowers in the garden remind her of the farm where she grew up.



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Deacon Mimi Eick and the fruits of her labor: a thriving garden and a cookbook compiled by kids at Greenburg Oaks, a housing complex run by Community Partners for Affordable Housing.

"It's not just the fresh produce, although that's extremely important since it's so expensive," Eick says of the importance of the garden. "It's the whole joy of the garden and the fact that it's beautiful. It's interesting from a scientific perspective. I love to see children having an interest in the natural world."

Eick is glad her role has extended beyond homework helper to garden cultivator. Gardening, field trips and other projects give kids access to opportunities they may not otherwise be exposed to. With CPAH's budget recently cut, Eick hopes more people will come forward and help the organization.

"Subsidized rent is really important," Eick says. "When affordable housing is cut and programs for children are cut, kids drop out of school, and there is a domino effect that goes on and on. We need organizations like CPAH."

Community Partners for Affordable Housing is a nonprofit organization that provides safe, healthy, affordable housing to needy individuals and families in Tigard, Tualatin and Southwest Portland. The Web site is www.cpahinc.org.

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