

Community Garden helps feed families



Kirk Boxleitner/Staff Photo

From left, Patrick, Sarah, Tia and Seth Noga tend to their plot in the Arlington Community Garden, just down the block from their new home, as part of their vegan, car-free, locally oriented lifestyle.

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ARLINGTON — With spring already well underway, all of the beds in the Arlington Community Garden have been rented out, and most of them have already been planted, as local gardeners not only continue to grow crops that they'll share with the Arlington Community Food Bank, but also with the "Million Tomato Compost Campaign."

Sarah Noga was joined by her sons Patrick, 12, and Seth, 2, as well as her daughter Tia, 6, in tending to their plot on the afternoon of Friday, April 26, as they often do since they live just down the block from the Community Garden.

"We were so excited to see this garden since we left behind a big garden at our

old house," said Noga, whose family recently moved from within town. "We were told that we could pay \$10 for the plot or donate a portion of our crops to the Food Bank, but we would have done both anyway, with whatever we couldn't use."

Corn, carrots, pumpkins, squash, garlic and herbs tend to be perennial favorites in Noga's garden — "Our kids love carrots, and will just pull them out of the ground, wash them off and eat them" — and while tomatoes have fared less well under their care, the Nogas have taken advantage of the 10 yards of compost donated by Lenz Enterprises of Stanwood, at no cost, as part of the Million Tomato Compost Campaign sponsored by the U.S. Composting Council.

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"The goal of the campaign is to grow 1 million tomatoes using donated compost in community gardens, with part of the tomatoes being donated to local food banks," said Virginia Hatch, who helps coordinate activities at the Arlington Community Garden with Bea Randall. "Lenz Enterprises not only donated and delivered the compost, but also supplied the garden with bark, to put between the garden beds, at a greatly reduced cost."

According to Hatch, she and Randall not only look forward to scheduling classes at the garden during the coming months, but also plan to work with garden participants to develop their own oversight committee, since the Arlington Garden Club has stepped back from overseeing the garden after about 11 years, although the group is still committed to providing some financial support for its annual upkeep.

While the Nogas embrace community gardening as part of their vegan, car-free, locally oriented lifestyle, Ray Knutson has taken on a whole host of additional gardening duties to honor the memory of his friend, Keith Sarkasian, who passed away at the end of March. Sarkasian was an agriculture teacher for more than 30 years before he retired from Arlington High School, and he became friends with

Knutson more than seven years ago through their shared love of gardening. When Sarkasian passed away, leaving behind four untended beds, Knutson added them to the one he was already caring for.

"I've tried to plant a few seeds, but it's been too cold yet," Knutson said. "The cabbage that's come up, I started that in my hothouse at home. Keith would start his plants at my hothouse all the time."

"He's carrying on Keith's legacy," said Joann Knutson, Ray's wife. "He's been very busy with it."

Margaret Sarkasian, Keith's widow, recalled how the Community Garden became an outlet for her husband when maintaining larger gardens at their old home proved too much for him.

"He would give away produce to whoever needed it," Margaret Sarkasian said, as she thanked Ray Knutson for taking custody of seven other garden spots around town that Keith had maintained. "Gardening was just his passion. It's why we moved into that house," she added as she pointed to the home just west of the Community Garden's grounds.

For more information on the Arlington Community Garden, log onto www.arlingtongardenclub.org/community.php. For further details on the Million Tomato Compost Campaign, log onto www.buy-compost.com.