



## IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A GARDEN

**WITH A KIWANIS CHILDREN'S FUND GRANT, A COMMUNITY AND ITS KIWANIS FAMILY PLANT AN EDUCATIONAL GARDEN.**

STORY BY WENDY ROSE GOULD

Many lessons are learned within a garden's walls. For example, tilling and tending soil demonstrate the payoff of hard work and instill patience. And harvesting crops teaches the gardener about growth, life cycles and the importance of healthy eating.

The staff of Sudduth Elementary School in Starkville, Mississippi, the Parent-Teacher Organization and the Oktibbeha County Master Gardeners recognized these inherent lessons and teamed up to create the Sudduth Elementary Environmental

Discovery (SEED) garden.

The project was a success, but the garden still needed some work. That's when Mississippi State University's Circle K Club and the Starkville Kiwanis Club stepped in. To renovate and expand the green space, CKI applied for, and received, a US\$2,000 CKI Tomorrow Fund grant from the Kiwanis Children's Fund.

"The big problem was that the garden was located on an extreme slope, and the kids had trouble with footing," says Don Kargis, a Starkville Kiwanis Club and PTO member who headed the project. "Our big budget items were to build a retaining wall, fix the slope, create proper irrigation and drainage and add more beds."

With the Tomorrow Fund—as well as support from the school, other clubs, community members and businesses—CKI

of MSU redesigned the garden and added 14 raised beds for a total of 20. With remaining supplies, members plan to create several beds that are more accessible to the school's special needs classes. This increase in size and accessibility allows the garden to serve more children, explains Kargis.

Teachers who want to participate in the SEED garden program enroll their classes in weekly 30-minute sessions. MSU students and Oktibbeha County Master Gardeners teach the hands-on lessons, which are considered supplemental, like music or art.

"They learn about everything from basic biology to gardening techniques to life cycles," Kargis says. "We also reinforce nutritional habits and do tastings so the children can taste what they're growing."

As the SEED garden shows, when a community comes together, it can achieve—or grow—anything.

