

Families plant fruit trees for the future at Victory Park

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NEW BEDFORD — With shovels and soil, families enthusiastically planted 13 fruit trees at Victory Park Sunday morning in a unique partnership to grow food for the future.

"This is phenomenal," said South End resident Jack Meunier. "It's setting precedents in the neighborhood. If you have food here you don't need to go down the street to get it."

Residents helped plant seven apple trees, three plum trees and two cherry trees donated to the city by RainforestMaker and Connecting for Change: A Bioneers by the Bay Conference, a program of the Marion Institute, which organized the community planting.

"This is preparing New Bedford for food security," said Chance Perks from UMass Dartmouth's sustainability initiative, who oversaw the program. "We are trying to increase food production in the city, exposing the younger generation to agriculture and food production, and reigniting the poor farm that used to be here."

More than 50 participants, many of them children, attended and learned about growing food and discovered more about the park and garden's history.

"It's a way to give back to the community so there will be fruit trees here for years to come," said Brooke Syvertsen, manager at CFC. "I had no idea how many people would come out. The hope is they will continue to come to care for the trees."

Virginia Ferreira of South Dartmouth came with her three grandchildren.

"I just think it's good for the earth and great for the children to see how things grow from the start. They don't know where fruits comes from," she said. "I just thought it would be good for them."

Many of the children said they were having a good time as they got their hands dirty and helped pat down the soil or fence off the new plantings around noon. Nick Larson, 12, said he brought mulch up in a wheelbarrow and helped put down some fertilizer as well.

South Dartmouth resident Cindy Haskell came to help and donated Organic Gem, a liquid fish fertilizer made by Advanced Marine Technologies.

"I read about it in the paper and thought of doing it," she said. "I would do anything for the beautification of New Bedford."

"In years to come we are going to see the fruits of our labor here," said Bernadette Souza, executive director of Trips4Kids, which helped organizing a reading of the children's book "The Giving Tree" after the plantings.

"Kids will come here all year. They will weed, trim and harvest. Planting a tree — what a wonderful way to pass on a legacy," she said.

"I planted trees and sunflowers and heard a story here today," said Stacy Garcia, 10, who left with a book, gardening gloves, a T-shirt, a water bottle and a bag of chips.

Founder of Boston-based RainforestMaker Jeffrey Glassman said they started a few years ago by planting trees in countries around the world and decided to go local. While this was the first planting on SouthCoast, he said they hope to do many more.

Southeast Regional Director of The Trustees of Reservations John Vasconcellos said he grew up in the South End and came to see the plantings. He pointed to the old saying that a secure society plants a tree for the next generation and said, "I may not get an apple from this tree but if a kid from the next generation gets it, that's a good thing."

Note: This article was amended on Tuesday, May 7, to correct the title of Bernadette Souza.