

# Construction class builds new garden shed at West



## WEST SHED

The Jefferson High School technology education construction class is building a garden shed for the West Elementary School garden, constructing it piece by piece at the high school. The building project gives the students real-life experience while providing West with a needed storage space for garden implements.





Posted: Daily Jefferson County Union

Thursday, November 16, 2017 10:19 am

By Pam Wilson [pwilson@dailyunion.com](mailto:pwilson@dailyunion.com)

JEFFERSON — West Elementary School's garden is only about five years old, but it has done a lot of growing in that time.

And now that it has grown out of its initial, miniature garden shed, the school has obtained grant funding to replace it with a much more substantial and lasting shed with more storage space.

The entire project represents a cooperative effort between many individuals and organizations, chief among them the Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation, which provided a \$5,000 grant to fund the project, and the Jefferson High School construction class, which is doing the actual building on site.

The foundation got its start last year when the Watertown Regional Health Center was sold to LifePoint, a for-profit company. Proceeds from the sale went into a nonprofit community health foundation that now operates independently of the hospital to carry on the mission of improving health outcomes in Watertown and the surrounding communities.

The garden shed grant was one of several community-wellness related grants the foundation announced over the summer.

Also playing a large part were the Jefferson County Master Gardeners, who have contributed countless hours to the garden and school projects at the garden. This group also oversees the district's after-school Garden Club, which meets at the West garden, but includes students from schools throughout the district.

The county gardening group provided essential consulting on what would be needed for the shed and oversaw the purchase of materials for the new shed.

Mike Hotter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners was present Tuesday when members of the Jefferson High School construction class erected the frame for the new garden shed on site.

The class previously had spent several weeks putting together the pieces that would form the frame of the shed at their workshop at Jefferson High School. They checked how the whole thing fit together last week behind the high school, and with “all systems go,” erected the full building at West Tuesday.

Hotter said that the old shed, a very small metal structure measuring only 8-by-10 feet and with a ceiling so low almost everybody had to stoop to fit inside, was beginning to rust.

The new shed, with a wood frame, measures 10-by-12 feet with a height of almost two stories, providing much more storage room while not taking up a lot more space in the garden.

It has a secure floor, a solid cement slab, as opposed to the dirt floor the previous shed had. This keeps rodents out and provides a better environment for storing tools.

At the top of the new shed are panels of clear plexiglass that let the light in, allowing work to be done inside the shed if necessary.

“It was hard to work in the old shed — you had to stoop to get in, and there just wasn’t much room in there,” Hotter said.

Mike Howard, West Elementary School principal, applied for the grant from the Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation, which covers not only the building construction, but also the purchase of new kid-size tools that will make it easier for students of all sizes to take part in activities in the garden.

Initially, the district was going to put out a bid seeking a regular construction company to build the shed. However, Howard got the idea of contacting the Jefferson High School construction class to see if it would be interested in doing the project.

Mike Fellin, who teaches the class, said that he saw this as a great opportunity for his students to get hands-on experience with a project that will make a difference in the community and will be utilized for years to come.

It was also a plus that West is located just a block from the high school. At times, construction classes travel up to 10 miles to work on site at a construction project. Here, there’s almost no travel time involved. The students could walk right over.

Students building the shed translates into savings for the district. This allows the grant money to go directly toward the building materials, with any leftover funds going toward additional tools and materials for use in the garden, like rakes, trowels and rubber gloves.

Howard said that the whole premise of the project is to make the garden more accessible to a greater number of students, thus promoting the goal of getting more students involved in on-site gardening and nutrition instruction.

He noted that many of the students at West don't have gardens at home. Having access to the school garden helps them see where their food comes from, learn about nutrition and how plants grow, become familiar with different healthy fruits and vegetables, and possibly develop a new interest they might not otherwise have tried.

Howard said the garden already is utilized as a hands-on resource by the whole school. The University of Wisconsin-Extension in Jefferson County has helped to develop a garden curriculum appropriate for kindergartners through second-graders and another more advanced set of lessons for third- through fifth-graders.

Fourth-grade teacher Jeanne Felton oversees the school's curricular garden program, while Diane Kachel coordinates the after-school Garden Club, with assistance from numerous members of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners, which is open to not only elementary schoolers, but also middle school students from throughout the district.

Howard said that the entire project has been a community endeavor from the start, and this most recent shed project just has extended that cooperation.

He credited local resident Scott Kammer with drawing up the architectural plans for the shed free-of-charge. Meanwhile, Larry Christianson donated his time to put in the concrete slab to form the shed's foundation.

The Master Gardeners have played a crucial role throughout the process, and the district's agriculture program also has helped with the garden, providing tilling and other assistance throughout the year. The garden utilizes donated fencing, and many of the tools that already are used by the school and garden club were donated.

"This is a real win for our school, the garden club, and our summer school program," Howard said.

With the shed's frame now completed on site, the project is expected to proceed swiftly, with the whole structure set for completion in the next couple of weeks, hopefully ahead of any major winter weather.