

PRIMAVERA AND LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOP COMMUNITY GARDEN

The walled garden in Barrio Anita, one of Tucson's oldest neighborhoods, lay fallow for approximately seven years – much too long in the eyes of neighbors who remembered the beauty the garden once provided. "It's my front yard and I want it to look nice, instead of a barren dirt patch," said Andy Butkovich who lives across the street from the vacant garden. Primavera owns the garden lot which lays on land adjacent to one of its transitional housing programs.

Through a common interest in revitalizing the garden, Primavera and members of the neighborhood began meeting in January 2009. In honor of the neighborhood's historical roots, the garden was named Tierra Anita which means "Anita earth." With goals of growing organic food and other plants, enjoying community, and providing inter-generational mentoring and educational opportunities, a partnership between Primavera and the neighbors of Barrio Anita was born.

Gail Ryser, neighborhood resident and chair of Tierra Anita, became involved in the project because she believes limited access to food has the potential to threaten all of us. "There are many avenues at the community level [through which] we can address [food insecurity], a community garden being one of them.... Food and cuisine are also vital components in maintaining cultural heritage and tradition. A garden offers a place for neighbors to carry on the cultural traditions of their ancestors expressed through food."

In order to turn the garden green and get it producing once again, the garden's neglected irrigation system needed repairs and the soil amend-

ing. A search for funding to cover startup costs resulted in a grant from PRO Neighborhoods, a Tucson-based community granting organization- www.proneighborhoods.org

In August, after grant funds enabled irrigation repairs and soil preparation, the garden was ready for planting. Neighbors renting plots planted seeds, many of which were heirloom crops native to Southern Arizona. "It was a beautiful, wild, fun thing when the water started flowing and people were planting everywhere," said neighborhood gardener Kent Sorenson. Primavera staff

area for gatherings, as well as art projects with neighborhood children.

Diane DePaul, another dedicated gardener, has goals of working with the residents of Primavera's transitional house to provide fresh vegetables for cooking. She said, "I'm really happy with this partnership. I think it's so great... I feel very comfortable with [the people] involved." Elva De La Torre, former manager of Primavera's Women's Services which operates the transitional house, is also pleased by the partnership. "The collaboration, community involvement, and positive impact on

the neighborhood is tremendous". Those involved are enthusiastic and determined to keep Tierra Anita producing. "My hope is that the garden will become a permanent fixture in our neighborhood and that the garden will draw greater participation from our neighbors... [and] help influence others toward a 'slow food' life-style," said Ryser.

As part of involvement with PRO Neighborhoods, Tierra Anita may serve as a



also got their hands dirty by planting in the agency plot. By October, the jungle-like tendrils of gourds and melons spilled over garden plot borders and corn and amaranth stalks stretched to the sky. Soon, the first fruits of Tierra Anita, melons and radishes, were harvested, and they were delicious!

Now, Tierra Anita continues to bring the neighbors of Barrio Anita together. Susan Whitaker, a neighborhood gardener said, "A lot of people are at the same level as me - interested in gardening but don't know very much.... Being able to learn from other [experienced gardeners] is great." Neighbors have held a composting workshop and plans are underway for the construction of a bulletin board, tool shed, and shaded

demonstration garden and mentor other Tucson neighborhoods in starting their own community gardens. Additionally, PRO Neighborhoods interns are working on a documentary, "Change in Action," and have chosen to include Tierra Anita in the project.

Tierra Anita historian, Lynn Waldrop, maintains a blog to record the garden's activities and capture photos and videos tierraanitacommunity.blogspot.com. Additionally, the collaboration between Barrio Anita and Primavera was recently featured on KVOA news in the Making a Difference segment.

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Photo taken by Denali Beeshligaii age 5