

Hug High School takes classroom to garden



Written by

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When President Barack Obama visited Reno last month, his entourage ate a salad that contained fresh vegetables grown in a garden at Hug High School.

"We used some kale and arugula that we got from Hug High School's garden in a salad nicoise," said Nancy Horn, co-owner with husband Joe of Dish Cafe & Catering, which provided meals for Obama's staff and the White House Press Corps.

"I think the garden is an amazing opportunity for the students to learn what can be grown in your own backyard," she said.

Hug High's more than 5,000-square-foot garden is part of a water conservation and relandscaping project at the school. Funded by the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, it is a cooperative effort with Reno's River School Farm, the school's culinary class and Urban Roots, a nonprofit organization that promotes school gardens.

On Thursday, a celebration of the opening of Hug's garden was held at the north Reno school featuring food from the garden prepared by students in a culinary class.

The menu included pork spareribs with pear and beet puree, pinto beans with arugula, parsnip muffins, chard stuffed with brown rice and onions, and fruit kabobs with fresh mint sauce.

"The garden was put in last year, and we wanted to hold a grand opening ceremony," said chef Wayne Tuma, who teaches cooking and culinary classes at Hug.

Using fresh produce from a garden right outside their door helps students understand the role it plays in better nutrition, Tuma said.

"The other nice thing about it is the students get to see the whole cycle of how food is grown before it gets to us and that instead of eating commercially processed foods, this is the way to go," he said.

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Water-efficient landscaping

The vegetable garden is one portion of the relandscaping project funded by TMWA, which has paid for more water-efficient landscaping at McQueen and Wooster high schools as part of its requirement under the Truckee River Operating Agreement to conserve water in the area.

About 23,000 square feet of grass was removed at Hug High and replaced partly by the drip-irrigated vegetable garden, said Lora Rose Richards, TMWA's administrator of conservation and community education.

"We've gotten different feedback on how much water a vegetable garden requires, so we hope this will be a test site for how to water a garden efficiently," she said.

Working with Tom Stille, owner of the River School Farm, they developed the plan for not only the garden at Hug, but also for a Great Basin plant area that has regional plants and a food forest area with fruit trees.

For the garden, recovered wood from one of TMWA's old flumes was used to build the bottom tracks for moveable plastic-covered hoop houses that can be rolled over different sections of the garden so plants can get an earlier start on the growing season.

On a tour of the garden earlier this week, Stille pointed out the garden's cool-season vegetables: green kale, collard, a variety of

bok choy, lettuce, garlic, beets, chard and spinach.

"This is micro-eco urban farming," he said. "Everything is grown organically with no pesticides."

Tomatoes, peppers and other plants already have been started in raised beds, and grape vines planted by the entrance are climbing up a wooden trellis made of recycled black locust.

"Our ultimate goal is to turn this over to the students in about three years," Stille said.

Interviews are being conducted to select a leader for a group of students who will take over planting, weeding and harvesting of the garden, but he said the school also is looking for a group of parent volunteers with gardening experience to work with them.

The garden is certified by the Nevada Department of Agriculture, which means its produce can be used in the school

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cafeteria and classes, and also be sold to local restaurants, Stille said.

Horn's Dish Cafe is one of three local restaurants that purchase fresh vegetables grown in Hug's garden.

The Fourth Street Bistro and Bricks Restaurant also are buyers, with most of the money going to the school and some to cover the expenses the River Farm School incurs in taking care of the garden, Stille said.

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