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Effort to save bats turns into community garden

A conservation project at West Utica Elementary is quickly growing — literally.

Thanks to a series of community grants, what started as an effort to help save bats has now become a community garden that will eventually be filled with around 15 raised beds of plants and vegetables.

“I want the students to learn how to have a garden that will allow them to grow food and help to sustain local species,” teacher Amber Fante said.

The idea for a garden originally sprouted out of an environmental unit coordinated earlier this year with the Organization for Bat Conservation.

The school and conversation group wanted to take their efforts to the next level by seeking grants to establish a “bat garden” in the school’s courtyard.

The bat grant proposal took flight, with \$8,500 in successful grants: \$5,000 from Lowe’s, \$2,000 from Kensington Church and a \$1,500 Scotts Miracle-Gro Grant.

The effort began in May with volunteers from Kensington Church clearing the school’s courtyard to prepare for the garden.

The plants were delivered by Telly’s Greenhouse the last week of school and planted by the students prior to the end of the school year. Students



PHOTO COURTESY OF UTICA COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Sandra Kannah helps plant at the West Utica Elementary School community garden.

and Fante are visiting the school once a week to water and maintain their garden.

One side of the courtyard has plants that will attract bugs for the bats, which are an endangered species.

The other side will have a vegetable garden, including squash, brussel sprouts, cabbage, sweet peppers and, much to the excitement of the students, pumpkins.

Fante said future plans include using grant funds to place 15 raised beds for planting.

Third grader Haley Dobbs said she feels the students are making a difference in their conservation efforts.

“We are able to save the bats,” she said. “We also will have vegetables this fall that we can eat.”

— Source: *Utica Community Schools*