

Samantha Korecki

Hello and welcome to J Talk, Muskegon Community College's official podcast. I am Samantha Korecki.

Daniel Boothe

And I am Daniel Booth.

Samantha Korecki

And we are coming to you from a very special place today as we turn the conversation to a new campaign to bring herbs back to MCC.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, Samantha called the Revive the Sensory Herbal Garden Campaign. What are we talking about? I will tell you. So 30 years ago at MCC in the courtyard outside the Stevenson Center, a group of MCC employees and members of the Western Michigan Herb Society planted an herb garden where students could find, quote, the beauty and explore the senses and more.

Samantha Korecki

And over the years, the garden has slowly deteriorated and has become a little overgrown in need of a little bit of love. But that's where this new campaign kicks in to bring the MCC Herbal Garden back to life. And here we are in the middle of our centennial celebration and what a better time could there be to infuse new life and energy into MCC's campus.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, and here to talk all about it as we sit down with her in her beautiful home is the lovely Marge Stidham, who was there in the beginning of the Herbal Garden and is leading the charge to see the Herbal Garden flourish once again. Miss Stidham, Thank you so much for being on the podcast today and thank you so much for opening up your home to us.

Marge

Well, thank you for coming.

Samantha Korecki

All right, so Marge, what is an herbal garden? What is the purpose of the herbal garden?

Marge

The purpose really is to introduce people to new ways of cooking and beauty also. There are just so many reasons. Getting together with people and sharing, Sometimes we share the herbs with other people, but mainly it's the good food.

Samantha Korecki

No kidding.

Marge

Enhancing good food.

Daniel Boothe

Well, I am, people can't see me because this is just an audio format, but clearly I like food. So that sounds fantastic. Listen, Marge, do us a favor. I want to go all the way back to the beginning. So we're going to go take a little time travel, go back 30 years in time, take us back to 1990. 1994, 1995. Tell me about how this came to be, your involvement, who were the key players in it? I know that our chair, board trustee, Diana Osborne, was there in the beginning. But how did this all come about?

Marge

Well, we were, I was part of the West Michigan Herb Group, and Diana Osborne became aware of us, and she thought it would be nice if we would put a garden in at the college. And so we were game for that. We put other gardens in, and it was a thrill to put one at the college. And then in the spring, we'd go and plant, and in the fall, we would tidy it up. We just loved working there. It was not only working together with our friends, but doing something nice for the community.

Samantha Korecki

Absolutely. And I'm sure it looked beautiful back in the day. Tell us a little bit about what it looked like.

Marge

Oh, it was beautiful. There were so many different types of herbs. We had a rose in memory of one of our members who was killed.

Samantha Korecki

Wow.

Marge

And that was special. And so we made sure that the rose always looked perfect.

Daniel Boothe

How great would that be to bring that rose back with this garden? Wouldn't it be awesome to bring that back and celebrate that memory again?

Marge

That's what we're hoping.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, you never forget, you know. No, You don't want to ever forget, right?

Marge

We're hoping that rose will be put back in.

Daniel Boothe

Kind of curious to see, you know, Marge, when you look back, have you always had a green thumb? Were you always a gardener? Where did your passion for this come from?

Marge

I was born on a farm.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, wow.

Marge

Okay. And my mother had flowers galore, and we had a big garden in the Muckland, and we had an orchard, and we had a vineyard. We had it all.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, wow.

Marge

And so.

Daniel Boothe

Was this in Michigan? Was this in West Michigan? Or where was this?

Marge

Was here in Michigan, in Cloverville.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, sure.

Marge

Not too far from the college.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, absolutely. Cloverville. Boy, things have changed. If it was all farmland then.

Marge

Actually, the whole area in Cloverville was part of my parents' 80-acre farm.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, wow.

Marge

Where the restaurant sits.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, the Teddy Spaghettis.

Marge

That was part of it also, and on down further.

Samantha Korecki

This garden has so much really cool history at MCC. Tell us a little bit about why it's so important to bring the garden back and why it's important to you.

Marge

Well, the reason it's important to me is because we worked so hard to get it underway. You could almost call it a friendship garden because we were We were a group that loved working together. We were almost sisters to the soil, you might say. And it's important that we have things from the past, not just new inventions, new things, but something to reminisce about.

Samantha Korecki

Absolutely, especially now with Daniel and I are on the marketing team at MCC. And so we recently redesigned MCC's logo to put the word community in bold to show that we're a community college and we want to be fostering a sense of community.

Marge

I love that community. That's what it is. We are community.

Samantha Korecki

It sounds like this garden really will be fostering a sense of community on campus.

Daniel Boothe

Well, Margie, you'd be happy to know too that the river that runs through campus, they turned back on the bubbler so that water is finally moving again. After decades of just being dormant and just being kind of a a swamp and a lagoon that it had kind of deteriorated into. And now they're replanting flowers and they're going to do all the all new grass along that courtyard right in there. So the garden is such a great addition to that to revive the campus because, you know, it's great to celebrate 100 years, but hey, let's how about another 100, and where are we going to go from here? I mean, we want to celebrate the past, but we also want to look to the future.

Marge

Excuse me, let this new generation know 100% what was before them and what can be now.

Daniel Boothe

Well, March 2, I'll tell you that I've said it before on this podcast as well. You know, a lot of our students, our students grew up, the current students that we have now have never not had a cell phone, have never not known what that is like to have a cell phone. And we, the older folk, saw that that progression that come in. I truly believe that there's going to be a revolution of these students now where they finally say, enough of the phone. And they put the phone down and they start going outside and wanting authentic, real experience other than just like staring at their phone. And I think that the garden is a perfect example of that, to get outdoors and to smell the fresh herbs.

Marge

Boy, can I say amen to that.

Daniel Boothe

Amen and amen. Fantastic. Okay, tell us about the herbs in the garden. I was confused. I didn't, you say that these really are for consumption. So I can go in there and chop down some basil and put it on my pizza.

Samantha Korecki

Oh, sure. So let's talk a little bit about this campaign to bring the herb garden back. So if someone was listening to our podcast and was just feeling super inspired and wanted to cut you a big check to make this happen, how much money do you need or want to raise to get this this garden going again.

Marge

Well, we're looking at 10,000, which to some people sounds like a lot, but...

Daniel Boothe

Not anymore.

Samantha Korecki

No.

Marge

You're right. We want to have it planted because Obviously, I'm 96 years old now.

Daniel Boothe

No, you're not.

Marge

Yes, I am.

Daniel Boothe

Oh my goodness gracious, do you look good. 96 years old.

Marge

I'm 96.

Daniel Boothe

God bless you. What is, we'll get to that in a minute.

Marge

And I just can't get down on my hands and knees and plant and so on and so forth. So I'm passing it on to the younger generation.

Daniel Boothe

Wow.

Marge

So I think it's herbs that gave me this long life.

Daniel Boothe

10,000, that was my next question, Marge. What is the key to your success? 96 years old made me all be so lucky. And you're spry. You've got energy, you're walking around. Oh, you're going to break the record. You're going to go to 120.

Marge

I'm not giving up.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, good for you. Oh, awesome.

Marge

There's too many things to do.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, absolutely.

Marge

I've got to see this through for one thing.

Daniel Boothe

I want, before we get to the rest of the campaign, I kind of want to back up a little bit and talk to you about 96 years old. It's just so wonderful. Can you tell us a little bit about your history at MCC? What was your role there? What did you do? And how did you enjoy your time here at Muskegon Community College over the years?

Marge

Oh my gosh. I was in financial aid and I worked with the students and I just loved it. And when they came in and they needed help, it was such a challenge to be able to help them

move along. And then after I retired, The president asked me if I would come back whenever I had free time to put all the records on the computer, which I did. And then another year, they asked me to do a program for displaced homemakers. I enjoyed that because I worked with the head of nursing, and we showed the women how they could get their education and enhance their life and move on. And my third stint was they wanted someone to do the summer lunch. And I picked up the salads and sandwiches and I came in and I baked cookies and everybody just loved it because the whole college smelled good.

Samantha Korecki

Oh, I bet.

Daniel Boothe

Hey, Mark, I'm going to come back. Clearly, once again, you can tell that I like cookies.

Marge

I do too.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, very good, very good. When was your last, when did you retire?

Marge

Oh, about 30 years ago.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, wow. Okay. Well, you know, that's probably why by the garden started to deteriorate that didn't have the spirit of Marge in the around MCZ.

Marge

Well, different ones would come in and they would be in charge of it, but as always happens, people move on and then new people come in and So it wasn't anything that was really steady.

Samantha Korecki

So with us today, as well as Marge, we also have Richard Vanderput McPherson from our foundation of MCC.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, he just walked in.

Samantha Korecki

And look at that. Richard's here to tell us a little bit more about the campaign. How is that going so far?

Richard

Yeah, so Marge called me, I would say earlier this year, and she had found out about the centennial, about the 100 year celebration, and she's like, we need to redo this garden. She connected me with Jane Kane, who was also an employee of MCC back in the day when they started this garden, and it is the sensory herbal garden, so it's kind of connecting with all of the senses. There's art, There's actually movement in the arts. So you hear the taste is from the herbs being used in culinary experiences, the smells, but it's also an accessible garden for the community. And so this was a project that I wanted to tackle with Marge. And we really want to make this happen and do a rededication event in 26 when we're formally celebrating our 100 years. So we kicked it off. very just, personal asks, connecting with potential donors that were interested in supporting a garden, nature lovers. We also got the Muskegon County Garden Club involved for future workshops and partnering with them. But we're at about right now 2,000 and then we're looking at raising 10,000. 10,000 will cover not only redoing the garden because there's many broken planters over the years, missing herbs, overgrown spaces. We're also going to add a secondary accessible path for everyone to be able to access the herbs. But we're looking at redoing this in the spring of 2026. So we have around 8,500 to do the project, and then the rest of it will go into a small fund to help sustain it in the future too.

Daniel Boothe

Fantastic. I can only imagine that there's got to be research that supports sensory gardens like this are support mental health and for students to get out there and to find peace in nature.

Richard

Yeah, no, absolutely. And this is a, it's a barrier-free beautification project, you know, that was started by Marge and Jane and Diana back in the day, and we're bringing it back. And I'm excited to do this rededication and we'll have, you know, new signage. We do have a formal brochure that students can use, but the plan is to incorporate plant biology so that students can understand what herbs are not only good for culinary, but good for medicinal purposes as well.

Daniel Boothe

So there's an educational component to it as well.

Richard

There is an educational component.

Samantha Korecki

Of course, we are a college.

Richard

So we have a new plant biologist that will be incorporating this. So I'm excited. I know Marge is excited. And we're going to get there. We're going to get there.

Marge

I don't think there's anybody within the area that I've traveled that hasn't had an application or an invitation to donate.

Samantha Korecki

That's right.

Marge

When I meet somebody, I'll say, how would you like to donate?

Daniel Boothe

Sure. Hey, 5 bucks, 10 bucks, 20 bucks, 100 bucks.

Samantha Korecki

She's doing the work, so are we. It's going to happen. We're making it happen.

Daniel Boothe

How about somebody's just listening to this podcast and comes along with a check for 8 grand, and we can just move on and start preparing. But That's going to be so much fun. I cannot wait to interview you again in the year when that ceremony is happening and to see the smile on your face to bring that thing back.

Marge

Oh my goodness. You know, and now that people are realizing what it is, they're happy to donate.

Daniel Boothe

Okay, the campaign, Revive the Sensory Herbal Garden, an environment where all may find beauty, explore the senses and more, looking for new accessible pathways, connect with classes including plant biology new ground cover, fixing and broken missing planters, and replanting all the herbs. If you would like to support the Sensory Herbal Garden Revive Campaign, donations can be made online at muskegoncc.edu/departments/foundation/advancement, or use the QR code above. That's going to be on a flyer that I'm looking at. You can find those around campus. Or contributions can be made payable to the Foundation for MCC 221 South Waterline Road, Muskegon, Michigan, 49442, or for questions or assistance with donations, contact my good friend Richard McPherson right here. He's the director of development, 231-777-0461. Marge, final thoughts?

Marge

Well, I know it's going to be a success because Richard is just pouring his heart out on this. And it's a joy working with them. And once people find out what we're about, and if they would only come to see the garden as it is now and envision what it will be like, I know that they will be happy to donate.

Daniel Boothe

Richard, final thoughts. I want to echo her comments, not to make the guy blush, but he's one of the good guys.

Marge

She is.

Richard

Oh, thank you. Thank you, Marge. I appreciate that. It's been wonderful working with you. And I'm excited to see this come to fruition and start having workshops. And a lot of people need to know that this is This is a community garden. So it is for students, it's for our faculty and staff to enjoy, but we want the community to come out and enjoy the space. We want them to stop by the campus and enjoy the herbs.

Marge

Exactly, and it could be a means of healing for people that need to get away, they need to get off by themselves, and what better place than the fragrance of the herbs and to just relax.

Daniel Boothe

Well, what better person to bring it to them than you, Marge? Thank you so much for your time today. We so appreciate it.

Marge

Well, thank you for coming. Nice meeting you, and we're going to make it a goal.

Samantha Korecki

Can't wait to see you again. Thanks for being on JTalk.