

# Raising environmentalism



Celebrating the new raised bed garden project in Smithville are, from left, Norman Jones, president of the Lost Pines Garden Club, Janet Jones, club secretary, Jose Rivera, community engagement for the city, and Ashley Garrison, director of the Smithville Recreation Center. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## Smithville project aims to spread conservation, love of gardening

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Conservationists in Smithville are aiming to make the town a certified Wildlife Habitat one community project at a time.

Its latest initiative, which has been on display since mid-November, is the raised bed garden project — a community-maintained area that will be used to teach residents about environmental

conservation.

Self-proclaimed conservationists Norman Jones and Janet Jones funded and spearheaded the project. The couple designed and built the raised beds over about five months with the help from members of the Lost Pines Garden Club, the Smithville Garden Club and city employees. Jones said a big goal of the project — in addition to the certification from the National Wildlife Federation — is encouraging Smithville's

youths to learn about environmentalism, which is why they built the garden in front of the town's recreation center.

"We're trying to honor our family. That's what this project is about," said Jones, president of the Lost Pines Garden Club. "We've been here since forever. We're big on conservation and we're big on nature, and the garden is a part of that."

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# Gardening

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The garden features flowers such as Blue Salvia, Pride of Barbados and Esperanza Gold Star.

With Bastrop County experiencing steady population growth over the past five years, supporters of the project believe a Wildlife Habitat certification could bring even more visitors to Smithville.

Jose Rivera, the community engagement coordinator for the city, said that by establishing itself as a protector of parks and wildlife, the town would likely attract more tourists and generate economic growth for businesses. While the town is small, its residents are very engaged, he said.

“Even in bigger cities, comparatively you don’t see as many programs as you do here,” Rivera said. “The population here tends to be a little on the older side. ... There are a lot of people who have time here, so that helps a lot.”

Jones said they started constructing the beds over the summer and designed everything with “innovative gardening” measures in mind. To avoid water waste, he said they incorporated a drip irrigation system with the goal of eventually having it automatically adjust water levels based on the weather. He said they also intentionally used mulch instead of tightly packed dirt to make maintenance more “user friendly” for volunteers of all ages. The materials

were sourced from local businesses.

Jones said he’d like to see more people in the community build raised garden beds around the town, as plants are more likely to thrive in a controlled, manicured environment when faced with Texas heat and drought.

The Smithville Garden Club will oversee maintenance of the beds and monitor how pollinators and birds interact with the plants. Marsha Williams, the second vice president of the club, said that while the garden looks sparse in its early stages, she expects it to grow into a lush habitat for wildlife.

“We have an oath that we repeat every time we meet at the garden club, and it’s about protecting our land, our water, our resources — everything,” Williams said. “That is so important to our wellbeing.”

Jones said the various conservation clubs are also working toward a Bird City Texas certification and a Tree City USA certification for Smithville. As they continue to pursue conservation projects, like building more birdhouses in parks, he said they hope to engage more young people to pass on the environmental commitment.

Williams said she hoped the garden inspires residents to create their own at home.

“To teach people to get out, get their hands in the soil, experience a love of gardening — that is something that is extremely valuable,” she said. “If we can pass that on to some young people, that would be exciting.”