

## Master Gardeners in Mission

By Carla Wilks

Did you know that there are at least seven Master Gardener Volunteers that are members of Mt. Pleasant Lutheran Church? Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) are interested in gardening, learning about gardening and volunteering in our community. In Wisconsin, MGVs are trained through the University of Wisconsin-Extension staff. MGVs who have taken training and completed their volunteer hour commitment of 24 hours of volunteering on a certified project and have 10 hours of continuing education each year retain their Master Gardener Volunteer certification.

There are 32 approved Master Gardener projects in the Kenosha/Racine area. Some of the projects in our community are:

The Garden of Giving, located behind the Lakeside Curative Services, is run and maintained by 29 MGVs who contributed 305 hours last year to growing healthy food. The Teaching Garden, located behind the Racine County Food Bank, is run by 24 MGVs who contributed 465 hours growing fruits and vegetables. These gardens are used for teaching and to provide food for distribution through the Racine County Food Bank.

Botany in the Classroom is a program that runs throughout the school year and introduces students to basic plant science concepts of seed starting, plant propagation and plant growth through fun activities planned and conducted by 29 MGVs.

Plant Health Advisors give yard and garden advice through the Horticulture Helpline and at the farmers' markets. This project reached more than 1,200 Racine county residents and accounted for about 1,000 hours of volunteer service.

The beautiful gardens at Ridgewood Care Center and DeKoven Foundation are planted and maintained by MGVs. These gardens are appreciated by many and are often used for meditation and learning.

The Green Works Program teaches adults with disabilities horticulture and life skills for enjoyment and potential employment in the greenhouse or farm industry. Using the greenhouse at Southern Center in Union Grove as a teaching site, students are taught skills throughout the winter months and then are placed with a job coach at site such as Ridgewood Care Center Gardens, Racine Visitor Center, or Racine County Building to provide "on the job" training. Twelve Master Gardener Volunteers assist in this extensive program.

Additional specialty programs in horticulture therapy are offered at RCOC for sensory and learning activities used in the birth to three year old program there. Also, incarcerated youth plant, harvest and provide produce to the community through the Youthful Friends program at the Albert Street correctional facility. All are programs designed and assisted by Master Gardener Volunteers.

You do not have to be a garden expert to become a Master Gardener Volunteer. Training is provided and there are many projects for a variety of interests and levels of participation. For more information on the master gardener program, visit

<http://racine.uwex.edu/horticulture>