

Little plot on the Prairie

By pitching in to create a neighborhood garden, Logan Square residents are helping dig the area out of an open space deficit. By **Lauren Viera**



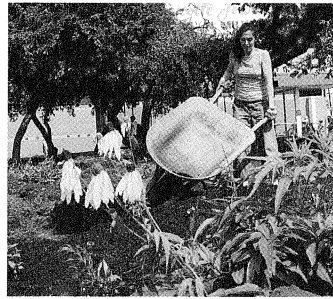
For residents who use the Logan Square Blue Line station, there's a reason to stop and smell the flowers—literally.

For more than a year, members of the Logan Square community have been slowly transforming a small patch of land next to the El stop's Kedzie Avenue entrance. Started by Logan Square Walks (a pedestrian-safety advocacy group), executed by archi-treasures (a grassroots group that brings local communities together through urban landscape projects), financed by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago (LISC) and supported by a half dozen other neighborhood groups, the Paseo Prairie Garden has given residents a reason to get, well, dirty with each other.

"It's an intergenerational art and garden project," says archi-treasures project manager Nathan Wright. He has been the go-to gardener for Paseo's volunteers, who include senior citizens from the adjacent Logan Vistas Elderly Apartments building. In addition to working on the garden, Logan Vistas residents and high schoolers recently completed a sculpture titled *Cuentos en la Pared*, which runs along a wall bordering the El entrance, just opposite the garden. The wall features 10 sculptures designed in the likenesses of

community members such as Rosita Del La Rosa of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and Michael Spencer, an artist and Kelvyn Park senior who has helped with the garden. Both projects have been spread out over the course of a year. Wright says that while it would be much easier—and faster—to hire a crew to do the work, that's not the point. "We want the community to get involved in beautifying their own environment," he explains. "We think it's important for them to take ownership of it."

The newly groomed area also helps boost the amount of open space in Logan Square, a neighborhood that the city's Department of Planning has earmarked as one of Chicago's most underserved in recent years.



Named Paseo for its various Spanish connotations—"passing through," "meandering" and "path"—the garden and its gently curved brick walk have replaced the run-down, litter-strewn lot that previously hugged the barren Milwaukee Avenue corner. On a recent Saturday morning, Wright and a dozen volunteers were happily weeding, mulching and planting prairie-appropriate perennials for the area. The majority of the plants—several thousand dollars' worth—were donated leftovers from the EcoChicago Group who received them from the wholesaler Midwest Groundcovers. That donation, plus the dozens of volunteers offering their labor, has kept the project's budget relatively low.

With volunteer-gardening sessions continuing throughout August, Wright estimates the garden expansion will be finished by 2007. "It's already having a big impact on this area," says Wright, who is a Logan Square resident. Local businesses have taken notice, too. Lula Café, kitty-corner to the garden, draws diners from various neighborhoods—many of whom arrive via El and walk past the garden. "I live on one corner and work on the other," says Lula chef-owner Jason Hammel. "We're super happy that people are transforming the space." Also across the street is the flower shop Fleur, whose owners made a donation in support of the garden. "I think it's really fantastic that [volunteers] took this little space and transformed it," says Fleur co-owner Kelly Uss. "It was very unattractive before—not at all a nice space to walk along. I'm very impressed that they're using natural prairie grasses. It's so much better for the environment, and it's going to attract butterflies and birds and be a really beautiful space."

Paseo Prairie Garden's next volunteer date is August 12, 10am-1pm. For more info, visit www.architreasures.org. To make a donation, visit www.firstgiving.com/paseoprairiegarden.

What's up with that?



Q What's up with pickup trucks not being allowed on Lake Shore Drive?

A In the '40s or '50s, when the bulk of LSD was built, an ordinance was passed banning vehicles designed for hauling freight—including pickup trucks—from using LSD and other boulevards, according to Chicago Department of Transportation spokesman Brian Steele. "Despite what a lot of people think, Lake Shore Drive is not a highway—and its speed limit and engineering reflect that," Steele says. The boulevards, which make up the city's 31-mile "Emerald Necklace," are wider than typical streets and usually have parkways and are more scenic, with a greener landscape. "[Their] intended purpose was not to have commercial vehicles," Steele says. The fine for driving one on LSD—Lake Shore Drive, that is—is \$75. As for driving a pickup while high on acid, there's no fine on the books, but it probably wouldn't make for a good trip if you got caught.—LP

Curious about something around town? E-mail us at outthere@timeoutchicago.com.

10 bucks well spent

Sticky politics

Tons of folks will be full of gay pride at Northalsted Market Days this weekend, but what about the rest of the year? We've always thought the best way to say anything loud and proud is on a bumper sticker, which is why we love *I Can't Even Drive Straight*. The stickers in this book double as postcards and include ten tongue-in-cheek sayings, such as "Do Ask, Do Tell" and the thought-provoking "If God Didn't Make Homosexuals, There Wouldn't Be Any." It doesn't matter where you go—these stickers will really drive your politics home. Available at Women and Children First 5233 N Clark St (773-769-9299); \$9.95.—Kevin Aeh



PHOTOS: TOP, LEFT AND CENTER, WATT CASSELL; TOP RIGHT, LEAH PIETRUSIAK; BOTTOM RIGHT, DONNA RICKLES