

Monty Tech's Sharek gets high marks for first year
— Page 3



Ex of man who killed cop: 'He is a Demon'
— Page 4



Warriors upset No. 1 Tigers
— Page 9



The Gardner News

Your Locally Owned Community Newspaper for Gardner, Ashburnham, Hubbardston, Phillipston, Templeton, Westminster, Winchendon



News staff photo by SAM BONACCI

Iraq veteran Mike Sullivan shovels soil for four raised garden beds as volunteers from the GFA Federal Credit Union mix the soil outside permanent veterans' housing in Gardner, Tuesday.

Garden project a boost for local veterans

Effort provides fresh, healthy food at MVOC housing

BY SAM BONACCI
NEWS STAFF WRITER

GARDNER — Veterans living in Nichols Street apartments are set to try their hand at gardening, as four above-ground garden beds were installed at permanent housing managed by the Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center on Tuesday.

"It will be good for the house and good for us money wise. Everything is so expensive now. Most of the guys here are on a fixed income," said Scott Hodgkins Jr., a Vietnam-era veteran who was hard at work shoveling soil into the garden beds.

"I've always wanted a small farm," he added.

With many of the 11 residents in the two apartments on fixed incomes, Mr. Hodgkins said it is important to have access to fresh vegetables. He was enthusiastic that the other members would get involved once they saw the garden come together.

"The other guys will get more enthused soon once they see the plants growing," he said.

Iraq veteran Mike Sullivan, who

'I could tell there was a real commitment and passion to doing this, and an excitement.'

— Joanne Foster

practices holistic medicine and lives in one of the apartments, said he was happy to be able to contribute and is looking forward to maintaining the garden.

"It's nice. It will be something for us to do," he said. "It helps. It feels like we are part of the center now."

MVOC Outreach Coordinator Trudy Dould said the planters at the apartments came out of a year-long diabetes cooking class run by Doug Miller, R.N., the diabetic education coordinator at Heywood Hospital.

Turn to GARDEN, Page 4



News staff photo by SAM BONACCI

Former MVOC intern Stephen Bassett shovels soil into one of four above-ground garden beds at permanent veterans' housing, Tuesday.

Garden project aids vets

From GARDEN, Page 1

Many veterans, she said — especially those from the Vietnam era — have diabetes and need the additional information on healthy eating.

The cooking program is set to be expanded into to a healthy living program so more veterans may benefit. Four of the residents at the home have diabetes, said Mr. Hodgkins.

Ms. Dould said the garden will help the veterans apply healthy cooking tips they've learned in the last year. Many, she said, do not have much experience in preparing fresh vegetables, with some having been previously homeless and others living alone.

"We have a lot of single males living the life of bachelors, and they don't always have the best culinary skills," she said.

The planters represent a community effort between a number of organizations. Heywood

Hospital provided funds for the raw materials, while volunteers came from the GFA Federal Credit Union and Clinton-based Growing Places. Joanne Foster, executive director of Growing Places, previously served as director of Gardner's House of Peace and Education.

Growing Places seeks to provide gardening opportunities to low-income populations, said Ms. Foster, mostly through partnerships with other nonprofits. She said the Gardner area — and this project in particular — are a perfect fit for the organization.

"That's what made this project so compelling, because we are always looking to serve low-income groups that not only have a need, but will benefit from a gardening program," she said. "I could tell there was a real commitment and passion to doing this, and an excitement ... this was an ideal situation."

sbonacci@thegardnernews.com