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Court takes bite out of hunger

Local judge hands out garden work

By JESSE DUNSMORE
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Free labor to produce healthy food for needy people -- little wonder Mid City Nutrition executive director Alice Rieves expects people will look at a new Port Huron program as a positive thing.

The Port Huron soup kitchen soon will benefit from a community garden.

The farming will be done by people sentenced to community service in the 72nd District Court.

St. Clair County Judge John Monaghan said he thought of the idea as a way to provide a daily work opportunity to the increasing number of people sentenced to community service.

"There's a ton of people who come through the system who traditionally would have paid fines and costs and don't have the money to pay fines and costs any more," Monaghan said.

With a plot provided by Acheson Ventures and seeds, plants and instruction from Michigan State University Extension and the St. Clair County Community College Horticulture Department, the garden should have at least two people working every day, Monaghan said.

Workers had their first day Saturday at the 50-by-80-foot lot on the northwest corner of Griswold and Eighth streets in Port Huron, putting in a fence and a water tank and planting some of the crops.

Because some are just seeds and others are plants that were transplanted after being incubated at the college, a staggered harvest could keep a steady stream of squash, tomatoes, watermelon and lots of other produce coming at the soup kitchen, Monaghan said.

Mid City Nutrition will distribute the food to a variety of low-income people and other nonprofit organizations, Rieves said.

The garden is especially convenient for the soup kitchen at this time of year.

"We don't cook any canned vegetables once harvest starts," Rieves said. "Everything that comes in in the summer is fresh. ... It'll help us quite a bit, but more important than just helping us, it'll be more fresh vegetables for low income people."
