

Groups join forces on garden for all

By John Lowman

The Facts

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ANGLETON — Jennifer Northrop enjoys gardening, but when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, she was concerned her ability to do so could be limited.

Not one to hide her green thumb under a bushel, Northrop teamed with the Multiple Sclerosis Society's Lone Star Chapter in an effort to allow those with disabilities to keep enjoying the hobby they love.

Northrop on Wednesday was part of a groundbreaking ceremony for Brazoria County's "Enabling Garden." The soon-to-be vegetable and flower garden off Hospital Drive near CR 171 is named for a design allowing anyone access, regardless of disability.

"I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2003; I can't do regular gardening," the Brookside Village resident said. "A garden isn't to be looked at. It's to be planted and to be played in. Everybody should be able to garden. This is all about people helping each other out."

Northrop joined Brazoria County Master Gardener's Association, officials with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, county Parks Director Richard Hurd and Pct. 2 Commissioner Matt Sebesta in dedicating a 100-by 50-foot plot at the Brazoria Environmental Education Station.

The facility is based on the premise that anyone who wants to garden should be able to do so, Northrop said. The garden will have about a dozen different planting schemes, including a vertical planting; raised beds graduating from a few inches off the ground to a few feet; plants on trellises; potted plants on pulleys; and water-grown plants.

Once the garden is planted and growing later this year, people with physical challenges will be encouraged to visit and find ways they can grow plants at home.

"That way, they can come out and see what's most comfortable for them," Northrop said. "It's nice to have an area where everyone is able to participate. That means a lot."

Under Northrop's leadership, the Multiple Sclerosis Society gave \$10,000 to the grassroots project in hopes it will grow into others around the community and beyond. The Master Gardeners own 5 acres at the site, so there's room for expansion, group member Lee Withers said.

"We decided it was time for us to jump on board," Withers said after joining Sebesta for the groundbreaking. "We're excited about it."

The garden will be part of the county's master plan for parks, Hurd said. Drainage work will begin immediately, and a ceremony is planned for this spring when the area is ready for planting, said Paula Craig with the extension service.

Once the garden is under way, photos and ideas will be posted at www.enablinggardens.com. Anyone is welcome to use any of the methods posted there, Northrop said.

Volunteers interested in helping with constructing the garden, working on the Web site or sponsorship can call Northrop at (281) 433-1588.

