

On a very windy Wednesday in Pontiac Illinois, volunteers converged on a plot of land behind OSF HealthCare Saint James-John W. Albrecht Medical Center.

They were there to try their hand at health care grown from the ground up.

\*\*\*SOT\*\*\*

Tim Johnson, OSF Saint James Director Facility and Ancillary Services

"The idea is to promote wellness with healthy nutrition and exercise, and just really be able to care for our community and give them some good, healthy food."

Wednesday was the first official planting of the OSF Saint James *Growing Well Garden* – a community garden that organizers hope has the power to make a difference in Livingston County, by combating food insecurity.

According to Feeding America, in 2015, 13 percent of households, or 15-point-8 million, were food insecure. This includes families without access to affordable nutritious options. Livingston County is certainly not immune to this national trend.

\*\*\*SOT\*\*\*

Deb Howard, Executive Director, United Way of Livingston Co.

"It's so cheap to buy a package of donuts for \$1.19 at the store, where a cucumber might cost you \$1.19, and you can't split it like you can those cupcakes. So it's more important that the kids get vegetables at a good, reasonable price or free of charge if they can't afford them, opposed to having those Little Debbie snacks when they come home from school."

In the garden's first year, its yield will go to the Pontiac Salvation Army, the Livingston County Food Pantry, and the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry at St. Mary's Catholic Church.

The 23-hundred square foot plot will include tomatoes, peppers, squash, green beans, potatoes, onions, cucumbers, watermelon and cantaloupe.

Phil Baker is a certified master gardener who is volunteering to help plan and maintain the plot.

\*\*\*SOT\*\*\*

Phil Baker, Master Gardener

"I think it's great. I think it's going to be a good thing and I hope it expands."

The *Growing Well Garden* is a partnership between the hospital and more than a dozen businesses and community groups across Pontiac. The organizations are providing help with everything, from volunteer labor to plant donations.

The Livingston County United way is one of those organizations, and Executive Director Deb Howard hopes this year's garden is the start of something special in the community.

\*\*\*SOT\*\*\*

Deb Howard, Executive Director, United Way of Livingston Co.

"I would love to see no kid in the county go without fruits or vegetables. Or food."

Health center horticulture is a growing trend. Gardens are sprouting up on hospital campuses across the country, in the name of community wellness. OSF Saint James is one of four OSF HealthCare hospitals with a garden, with more in the planning stages.