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Headwaters? Friendship Gardens marks 25th anniversary

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Gardening experts and novices alike braved the rain and chilly weather this past weekend as they looked to raise funds for a continually growing initiative.

Headwaters Health Care Centre (HHCC) held its annual Friendship Gardens plant sale on Saturday (May 25) from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. on the grounds of the local hospital and raised $18,000. The annual plant sale is organized in partnership with Headwaters Health Care Foundation and looks to raise funds to support the maintenance and restoration of the gardens at Headwaters Hospital.

?[The sale] is about building some funds for the gardens themselves so the volunteers can actually do the work they do on them,? said Joel Porter, director of philanthropy for the Headwaters Health Care Foundation. ?It's also a wonderful community engagement activity. The folks that come out, they want to come and buy one plant and they leave with a whole wheelbarrow full.?

While this year's plant sale served once again as a fundraiser for the Friendship Gardens, it also marked a significant milestone in the initiative's history as they celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Friendship Gardens.

The creation of the Friendship Gardens was started in 1997 by a group of volunteers called Friends of Headwaters. After having raised money to buy equipment and a critical care unit for the then-new hospital, the group began looking at ways to beautify the new facility from the outside and decided to create a patient garden.

?I would love to say I started off with this vision of taking over the whole grounds and having a group of fellow volunteers build and maintain them, but I didn't have that; it was initially one and done,? said Lynn Sinclair-Smith, Friendship Garden coordinator. ?That one garden has now parlayed into something bigger.?

Since the inception of the first patient garden at Headwaters, the number of gardens on the hospital grounds has grown exponentially. In 2019, Headwaters Health Care Centre celebrated the unveiling of four new friendship gardens bringing the total number in the collection to 20 plus gardens and water features as well as more than 400 native and hybrid trees.

Initially planned as one garden, the vision of the Friendship Gardens has also changed to focus on giving as many patient rooms a view of the gardens.

Sinclair-Smith spoke about the significance the gardens have for patients at the hospital as well as staff. She also shared her family's own experience with the gardens.

?[The Friendship Gardens] are just these lovely little quiet places to go to, to feel rejuvenated. My husband spent five weeks in the hospital and the gardens were the last thing he saw. He enjoyed looking out to see the shrubs and the little birds, and the life,? she recalled.

Each of the gardens is designed and maintained by a group of active volunteers and supported by community donations.

?It's pretty amazing to have a group of volunteers dedicated for 25 years to care for the grounds around the hospital, knowing that the patients, some of whom will end their life at this hospital get to enjoy it,? said Porter.

In 2018, the Friendship Gardens and the Town of Orangeville won the prestigious national award, ?Communities in Bloom.? Students who have volunteered at Friendship Gardens have also gone on to win environmental awards from the University of

Guelph and the University of Waterloo.

?The Friendship Gardens is really collaborative and it's for the community by the community. There's a very strong connection there,? said Sinclair-Smith.

To learn more about the Friendship Gardens initiative or to inquire about ways to donate and volunteer, visit www.friendshipgardens.ca.