

Master Gardeners plan programs on new Azle park (Thursday, March 13, 2008)

Spring is in the air – and despite last week’s snow, there’s more than a little excitement ready to burst into bloom just off Main Street in Azle.

The Parker County Master Gardener Association has taken on the job of landscaping several areas in Azle’s new Central Park, which is due for completion in July on 28 acres off Main Street.

The group will design the landscaping at the park’s entrance, next door to the Masonic Lodge, as well as around the gazebo, which is almost ready to be set in place down in the park.

The Azle Rotary Club has agreed to help with the project, both financially and by providing volunteer labor to complete the job – but additional volunteers and donations are still appreciated.

To earn their credentials through the Texas Cooperative Extension Service, Master Gardeners must complete not only the required hours of coursework, but at least 50 hours of volunteer service as well. Parker County Master Gardener Dianne Bleau, who is coordinating the Main Street project along with Tammy Edwards, a Tarrant County Master Gardener, sees the club’s role as mostly educational.

“We’re not a labor force,” she said. “Our role is to educate.”

To that end, a series of educational programs will begin this Saturday, March 15, and continue in April, May and June using the park as both an inspiration and a resource.

Saturday’s program, which will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Cross Timbers Conference Center at 404 West Main, will include three presentations.

Gay Larson will speak on memorial garden landscaping and design, followed by Steve Chaney on EarthKind roses. Barbara Herrmann will conclude the program with a presentation on native and adapted plants and an identification of the plants used in the park’s entry landscape.

The programs are free and open to the public. Future programs are scheduled April 18, May 17 and on a date to be determined in June.

The April 18 program, also from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Cross Timbers Conference Center, will feature Professor Mark Schusler on soil and soil fertility, Homer Babbitt on water conservation and John Snowden on grasses.

The May 17 program will feature a speaker on tree identification, Bleau on growing daylilies, and LaDonna Stockstill on attracting butterflies to the garden.

In June, the tentative schedule includes Don Wilhelm on trees and wildlife habitat and Earl Hogan on native plants. The June program will be held in the park itself, giving Master Gardeners and volunteers an opportunity to “walk around and show off our hard work,” Bleau said.

The Texas Master Gardener program is an educational activity designed to increase the availability of horticultural information and improve the quality of landscaping throughout the state. The Master Gardeners program provides training and educational opportunities for both professional and amateur horticulturists.

The Parker County Master Gardener Association, which started with 12 members in 1998, has 60 members now and provides more than 9,000 hours of community service annually in Parker County.

Among the group’s projects are Chandor Gardens in Weatherford, Clark Gardens just east of Mineral Wells, the Aledo City Hall and Community Center, the Springtown Legends Museum, the Ag Services Center in Weatherford, the National Vietnam War Museum Garden in Mineral Wells, a Water-Wise Demonstration Garden and the Weatherford Library Gardens. They also hold an Arbor Day event and plant sales, and have published a complete gardening handbook for Parker County titled *The Real Dirt*.

The Parker County Master Gardeners are available at the Extension Office from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays to research and answer questions about plants, trees,

gardens, lawns, insects and other home gardening and landscaping issues. They also maintain an active speakers bureau and provide a yearly scholarship to a student from Parker County who plans to pursue a degree in horticulture or a related subject.

Azle's Tammy Edwards is the current president of the Tarrant County Master Gardeners Association, which is both older and larger than its Parker County counterpart.

Although it virtually straddles the county line, Azle's Central Park is located in Parker County.

To learn more about the Master Gardener program, visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/mastergd/county.html> or contact the Parker County Master Gardeners at 817-598-6168 or at www.pcmga-texas.org.