REACH Community Garden Grand Opening Episode 146

00:00:00 **Gary**

This garden here is for the benefit of our foster youth, which is real important. This is a group of students that have high risk of having challenges in their life. And so, we want to do everything we can to clear the hurdles for them.

00:00:16 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:18 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Magic Podcast.

00:00:22 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:39 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion-

00:00:43 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:00:48 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pomona! Psychology major, English major ...

00:00:53 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time-

00:00:56 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:04 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:06 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:09 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:20 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:25 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:30 **Sun**

Welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast. I'm your host, Sun Ezzell. In today's episode of Magic Mountie Podcast, host Tania Anders, joins the REACH Program at a very special celebration. The REACH Program supports current and former foster youth on their educational journeys at Mt. SAC and beyond. We hope you enjoy today's episode celebrating the grand opening of the REACH Community Garden.

00:01:57 **Tania**

I'm standing here at the REACH Community Garden for its opening. We are so excited to have this new area on our campus. My name is Tania Anders. I'm one of the Magic Mountie hosts, and I am joined here by Jesse Lopez, who is the Director of REACH. Welcome to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Jesse, thank you so much for taking the time, and to share a little bit about this area with us on its opening day.

00:02:26 **Jesse**

Thank you for having us here and thank you for giving us the opportunity to share about this wonderful event that is coming out of our program, but it's for the whole Mt. SAC community and the community at large.

00:02:36 **Tania**

So, how did this idea come about?

00:02:39 **Jesse**

So, during the pandemic, one of our students, we remained in contact throughout 2020 basically. And she had just been laid off from her job and we had created an emergency fund through REACH, to support our students that were in need of just meeting their basic needs.

00:02:54 **Jesse**

And when we asked, "Hey, would you need support for groceries or food?" She responded and said, "Actually I'm okay when it comes to groceries, I grow most of my vegetables and most of my meals."

00:03:06 **Jesse**

And then she had the idea of saying, "Would this be something that maybe REACH students should learn? And maybe we can implement that on campus or within the REACH Program," which we loved the idea. Obviously, we put a pin on it because it was 2020, it was a whole different world. But we always thought about as soon as we can, we're going to go ahead and do that.

00:03:26 **Jesse**

And so, then fast forward a couple years later, and there's a couple of steps in there, including applying for a grant to do this, bringing on a faculty member that was going to create all these opportunities to connect on campus and voila, March 25th, 2020 happened and we're really excited to have the opening.

00:03:43 **Tania**

Wow, that is such a beautiful story. So, for how long have your students been preparing the beds here that we're seeing behind us? And I know you're planning on doing a planting session today for the opening, right? And so, for how long has this been in the making now?

00:04:01 **Jesse**

So, the application for the grant happened in summer of 2021. So, we received the funds early fall of 2021. Then around October, November, one of our faculty members reached out to us and saying, "Hey, I found out about the REACH Program, I want to collaborate in any way, how can I be of support to the REACH Program?"

00:04:25 **Jesse**

And so, we had a Zoom meeting just to basically see what would work. After just conversation, digressing in topics and so on, it came to be that she grows things in her house and she has experience doing these things. And so I said, "Well, actually we want to have a community garden for REACH. I have no expertise when it comes to that. So, we obviously want to bring someone on board . We have one of our alumni, that's her major, and she basically came up with this idea and she's onboard to help us, but we would want more support."

00:04:54 **Jesse**

So, then in November, we started, okay, how are we going to come create this whole thing? We started coming up with a checklist. The three of us kept meeting, buying things, putting these things, connecting on campus with various people and resources that would help us. We had people from the sanctuary, we had people from horticulture, from the farm.

00:05:11 **Jesse**

Everyone came together and really supported us from day one, gave us anything that they could give us. And so, we've been doing every week some work here and there from liaisoning with nurseries and even buying places from local institutions that sell soil or sell beds and all that. It started coming along little by little.

00:05:34 **Jesse**

And so, then I think a couple of weeks ago is when we actually started filling in with soil and everything, and then at that point, we're like, okay, we're ready to schedule a meeting actually to start this. And so, here we are. And now, moving forward, we are hiring three student workers that they will be tasked with taking care of the garden on a daily basis: watering, cleaning it.

00:05:57 **Jesse**

But the whole point is to have options for the community to stop by as little or as much as they want to get involved at any point, without any pressure, knowing that I can come and someone's going to teach me, someone's going to guide me.

00:06:09 **Jesse**

But if I can't come, someone's going to still be taking care of these crops. And then obviously, welcome everyone for harvest so that they can take whatever it is that we grow here. The whole point is to do this - anything that we have left over, and maybe eventually scale up so that we can go ahead and start liaisoning with the Mountie fresh food pantry here and start giving all this fresh produce to them so that every other student that can't make it to the garden, can still benefit from it.

00:06:35 **Tania**

That is so fantastic. So, you already answered a couple of my questions that I would've had for you because I'm really bad at growing things because I'm really bad at watering and all of those things. So, it's fantastic to hear that you have students workers who will be able to help with this on a regular basis, but is this also going to be part of some classes that will come over here or it's really outside of class?

00:07:01 **Jesse**

At this point, we do have some professors that are bringing their classes to participate, to use it as a hands-on experience as a just voluntary base and just basically host it within our garden. The plan is to eventually scale up and maybe use this to actively teach people either through credit, non-credit, whatever it may be for them to utilize these gardens in a class.

00:07:23 **Jesse**

We also want to make sure that we build a component in which people can come in, commit for maybe a semester or a season, grow something, learn how to do it. And then perhaps, provide opportunities for a small grant for them to replicate this in their community. As Mt. SAC is, it's a learning institution, it's an educational institution.

00:07:41 **Jesse**

So, we want to make sure that we're equipping people to learn something for their benefit, whether it's for personal enrichment or for a career, and then go back to the community and develop more of these. It's great that we have six gardens now, but the world needs more than that. And so, we won't be able to put all of them together ourselves, but we can teach people that can replicate it and reach parts of the community that we can't.

00:08:04 **Tania**

So, when you say a community garden, you mean beyond the community of the Mt. SAC student and faculty and staff. And manage our community, you mean the City of Walnut and surrounding areas, right? So, how are you advertising this garden within the community then? And are you scheduling regular trainings basically, right? So, that you say, "Well, if you're interested in learning how to grow carrots, we have something for you coming up." So, how are you basically advertising this in the community?

00:08:35 **Jesse**

So, at this point, we're not there yet. We don't want to advertise something that we don't have the resources for yet. However, that is obviously, in the plan. We recently created a social media, Instagram handle for the garden, where we're going to keep putting updates. We're going to encourage people to share. Anyone that we liaison, anyone that supports us, we're going to make sure that we tag them to increase awareness to this.

00:08:57 **Jesse**

The whole purpose is, especially this semester, it's our trial run, it's our pilot period per se. We want to make sure we get these things out of the way. And if we make any mistakes, we make them a little bit behind closed doors and fix them so that whenever we invite the broader community, we have our things together a little bit better.

00:09:16 **Jesse**

But moving forward, we want to make sure that we do utilize all the resources that Mt. SAC has. And what that means is bringing in more faculty that are already doing this, connecting very well with the community, very well with people beyond the board of Mt. SAC. And we have this infrastructure at Mt. SAC that is fantastic.

00:09:35 **Jesse**

And I think we have learned in this period of creating this whole thing, just how many resources and how blessed and privileged we are here at Mt. SAC and how many talented people we have that are part of this. And so, we want to make sure that we maximize all that and leverage all those resources that currently exist. And that's why we're going to continue to do this and talk to me six months from now, and I can give you a detailed plan of how we're reaching out to more communities.

00:09:59 **Tania**

That is so fantastic. Well, I'm excited to be here for this opening and we're starting to see people pour in, so I'll try to capture some more voices. Thank you so much for now.

00:10:10 **Tania**

So, I'm now joined by one of the Biology Department faculty member who has been instrumental in pushing forward this project as well. So, would you be so kind and introduce yourself?

00:10:23 **Maura**

Sure. My name is Maura Palacios Mejia, and I am a new faculty member in the Biology Department.

00:10:29 **Tania**

Oh, welcome to Mt. SAC. When did you start here?

00:10:32 **Maura**

I just started in the fall. So, fall of 2020.

00:10:37 **Tania**

Wow, that is so exciting. Well, welcome to our Mt. SAC Community and what an impact you're already making. So, I was just talking to Jesse about how this whole project came about and that you have been such a big supporter of the program. So, can you tell me a little bit about what your last couple of weeks looked like getting ready for today's grand opening?

00:10:56 **Maura**

Yes, absolutely. It's been a lot of labor, a lot of labor of love. So, it's been a lot of organizing. So, we've had several groups come in over the past several weekends. We started with a team of three and we learned really quickly in putting the raise beds together that we may need to have some power tools. So, to make one raise bed, it took us four hours between three people.

00:11:15 **Maura**

And then we learned that lesson the hard way and got technology, and we were able to make that go a little bit faster. And so, the next time, we actually met, we had some power tools and we were able to build out all the raised beds in about three hours. So, what took us for one, we were able to make them all. Then from there, we started to kind of investigate about how to make this more of a sustainable practice.

00:11:35 **Maura**

So, what we did is in order to reduce the cost for the amount of soil, because we have tall raised beds, we asked the sanctuary if they would be willing to donate some logs. So, although, you can't see it physically there, the bottom half of the entire raised bed actually has pieces of log that were given to us from the sanctuary. And you can see these wood chips right here are, an image of where they were before.

00:11:58 **Maura**

So, we also had to get some gopher wire because we have some gopher problems. And so, we had to set that up. And so, there's like different layers to this whole thing. And then we were able to purchase some soil, especially prepared for the type of mix that we wanted for the plants that we're growing. And you can see there's a pile right over there behind you, and that was delivered about two weeks ago.

00:12:18 **Maura**

So, it's been a lot of planning, a lot of organizing, a lot of meeting on the weekends. And we finally got everything set up. Yesterday, and the day before I spent two hours watering the soil in preparation for today because we hadn't touched it since about a week ago. And so, the soil had dried out. And yesterday, we went with Jesse to purchase all of the lovely plants that we have here today.

00:12:39 **Maura**

And so, you can see that they range from spinach to lettuce. We have a lot of tomatoes, we have squash, we have chives, so many different, beautiful species that we're going to be putting into the ground today for our grand opening event.

00:12:51 **Tania**

Oh, that is so exciting. I was going to ask, what are you going to be planting? And it looks like a lot of these things will be ready to go fairly quickly then, right? So, harvest is not too far away,

00:13:03 **Maura**

Not too far. The lovely things about this is that within two months, you can already have something to harvest and as they grow, for example, like the lettuce, you'll take some clippings and that'll continue to multiply all on its own. And so, yeah, we're so, so excited and to maximize our space, we're also trying to put cages around things like tomatoes and squash to kind of train them to go up instead of outwards. And so, that's going to require some love.

00:13:25 **Maura**

And Jesse, as well in the last week, we've hired three new student workers that came from the Horticulture Department. And so, it's been just really good, just having community build around this. I'm actually another ... you see all those people over there, they're part of the garden on the other side that is run by the older adults community.

00:13:44 **Maura**

And I connected with them as well and actually taking a class there and I invited them to come and they're here and I'm so excited to kind of share this experience with them. And I'm so excited about all the possibilities that this will bring for our students and faculty and everyone.

00:14:00 **Tania**

Thank you so much. I know you're getting really busy setting up here, so I appreciate your time and I'll capture some more voices of today's wonderful event. Thank you.

00:14:09 **Tania**

I'm joined now by Board of Trustees member, Gary Chow, who apparently also loves gardening or maybe you're here to help with the harvest when they get to that point. So, nice to see you here.

00:14:26 **Gary**

Good to see everybody. This is a unique experience for me because gardening is not one of my areas of expertise. In fact, I'm trying to think of anything that I ever grew in a garden to plant, and I cannot remember anything in the last 30 years. So, but it's really a good experience.

00:14:46 **Gary**

I think this garden here is for the benefit of our foster youth, which is real important. This is a group of students that have high risk of having challenges in their life. And so, we want to do everything we can to clear the hurdles for them. And that's pretty much the end of my comment. Thank you for interviewing me.

00:15:07 **Tania**

Oh, thank you so much for being here. And I'll admit I'm the same. I've grown tomatoes, but that's about what I've managed, and herbs I try, and everything kind of failed at some point. But we're really happy that you're here. Thank you so much.

00:15:20 **Tania**

It's so great to see so many folks here that I also know. So, I'm here with Jared Burton, who is a librarian and also super interested in sustainability. He's been leading the sustainability awards on our campus. It's so great to see you here at the opening. How are you doing?

00:15:39 **Jared**

I'm doing great, Tanya, how are you?

00:15:40 **Tania**

Doing great. So, are you eager to get your hands dirty?

00:15:45 **Jared**

Yes, I am. I can't wait to plant some seeds in the raised beds. They look awesome. I can't wait to follow up with them and see how they're doing over time. And maybe one day even be able to like harvest something from them and make something to eat.

00:15:58 **Tania**

That would be great. How about you, Tyler?

00:16:01 **Tyler**

Everything Jared said, I agree with. I'm excited to see kind of what they grow here and I'm really excited to see the community out here and being a part of this program. I think the REACH Program, Maura, is a colleague of mine, she did an outstanding job. I know she put a lot of work into this and it looks fantastic and I can't wait.

00:16:16 **Tania**

Yeah. And I heard that already from Maura, how amazing the collaboration has been. You are one of the co-directors of the wildlife sanctuary and you brought some material over here also for her to use. So, it's just beautiful to see how the whole Mt. SAC community is coming together.

00:16:32 **Tyler**

Yeah, she did an outstanding job of kind of coordinating the different players to get this to work. And I think it's just an outstanding job. I don't want to take any credit, I just halt some logs over here, but if you're going to give me some, I'll take it. But she did all the hard work.

00:16:47 **Tania**

Thanks so much, Tyler.

00:16:48 **Tania**

I'm joined by Mia now, one of our students, Mt. SAC students. And so, Mia it's so exciting to see you present here also. Do you enjoy gardening?

00:16:58 **Mia**

I do enjoy gardening. Don't know much about how to do it, but I'm here to learn today.

00:17:02 **Tania**

Awesome. So, what are you going to plant? What are you planning on putting in the ground here?

00:17:09 **Mia**

I think they mentioned something about us planting some corn, is that right?

00:17:13 **Tania**

Yeah, they bought a couple of different things. So, are you going to be a regular coming here?

00:17:18 **Mia**

I will try my best to keep it regular. Yeah, because consistency is key, right?

00:17:21 **Tania**

That's right. And then for the harvest, right? That's one we'll all show up. So, how long have you been at Mt. SAC?

00:17:27 **Mia**

I've been at Mt. SAC since 2019. So, I think I'm considered a junior now, is that right? Or a senior this year? Yes.

00:17:36 **Tania**

So, what are your plans for the future?

00:17:37 **Mia**

Hopefully, I become a teacher. Yeah, and I want to just do my best to kind of be inspiring to students and the youth and let them know that anything is possible as long as they set their mind to it.

00:17:49 **Tania**

That's fantastic, Mia. Thank you so much. Let's go and help with the planting.

00:17:56 **Speaker 14**

We're digging a hole. The soil in this bed is nice and soft because it is new soil that you got from a purveyor that I think it's a mixture of topsoil and compost. So, it's a nice loose soil. It's not compacted. So, we're going to dig a hole pretty much the same size as the plant itself.

00:18:12 **Speaker 14**

Now, you have options when you plant. Sometimes, we'll put a little planting fertilizer in the hole and I use an organic fertilizer. Not absolutely necessary when you plant. Sometimes it's better to wait a few days and fertilizer after it's been in there. So, we're going to go ahead and get this in here.

00:18:29 **Speaker 14**

Now, you want to inspect the roots. In this case, they're healthy. They're not circling around too bad, but we always want to kind of loosen them up a little bit. This is called tickling the roots.

00:18:39 **Speaker 14**

Now, if the roots were circling around, we'd want to unravel all of that because you don't want the roots to keep circling around in the hole when you plant it. You want them to extend into the soil area beyond. So, we've got our hole dug.

00:18:51 **Speaker 14**

And now, with a tomato ... you can water it a little bit more because it's pretty dry in there. Now, with a tomato, if it's short and a nice shape and size, you're fine. If it's gotten real leggy, if it's gotten very tall and legging kind of falling over, you can do something really special with a tomato. You can plant it very deep. We could dig the hole down and plant that all the way down.

00:19:12 **Speaker 14**

In this case. I'm going to go ahead here and I'll remove a couple of bottom leaves here and go ahead and demonstrate that to you that if it were very leggy, we would remove these bottom leaves. And then when we plant it, we're going to plant it very deep and cover up those leaf nodes where I remove those leaves. At each of those nodes, we're going to get rooting that takes place.

00:19:32 **Speaker 14**

So, in a plant that's leggy, if you plant it deep, you'll get extra rooting to support the plant, to take the nutrients better. In this case though, we're just going to go with pretty much what we got. Dig a little bit deeper and then fill in around it.

00:19:45 **Speaker 14**

Now, I like to put kind of a watering way around a newly planted plant particularly, if you have hard clay soil at home that the water doesn't penetrate very well, it should penetrate pretty well in this. So, in this newly planted plant, if you just have a little well around it, so that as you're watering, the water will penetrate, go down rather than rolling off is the whole idea. So, there we go. Just as simple as that.

00:20:13 **Tania**

Oh, that looks lovely. What did you plant here?

00:20:16 **Speaker 15**

Squash. This is a zucchini squash, yellow.

00:20:20 **Tania**

Yum.

00:20:21 **Speaker 15**

And we were making a mound around it so that the water can collect around it and feed it really well.

00:20:29 **Tania**

That looks fantastic. How are you enjoying the planting?

00:20:32 **Speaker 16**

Oh my God, I am loving it and my students are loving it also. We're from ABE, building 30 Adult Basic Education Center and our students are here right now, planting the plants.

00:20:46 **Tania**

Wonderful. So, is this part of a class or they're just volunteering their time?

00:20:51 **Speaker 16**

No, they're volunteering it. They are taking computer classes in Adult Basic Education Center. And for first time, we have an event which is closer to us right there. Usually, we have to go on main campus and it's hard for students to walk there and look at how much they enjoying planting peppers, tomatoes, you name it - basil.

00:21:12 **Tania**

That's fantastic. So, you want to walk over to your students with me and maybe introduce them?

00:21:19 **Speaker 16**

Absolutely, yes, let's go. Okay. Ama, Lily, Baka - do you want to say something? How are you feeling right now?

00:21:24 **Student**

So happy. Good that we're learning, good.

00:21:26 **Speaker 16**

What do you say?

00:21:28 **Student**

I feel very good.

00:21:31 **Tania**

Fantastic.

00:21:33 **Student**

I feel happy.

00:21:35 **Tania**

How could we not, right? The weather is fantastic and we're growing something.

00:21:39 **Student**

We love it. We're having fun. We're happy, we're learning every single day and the teachers are wonderful, counselors, everybody.

00:21:46 **Tania**

You're so kind. And today, you're learning how to plant some peppers, and how fantastic is that?

00:21:55 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.