



# City of De Pere Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Urban Orchards growing in number, interest in De Pere

**De Pere, WI:** The seeds have been planted in De Pere – quite literally – for residents to someday have convenient, unique access to fresh fruit while walking, biking or driving throughout the City. Better still, local food pantries will have another source of fresh fruit to make available to those in need.

This possibility is becoming a reality through De Pere’s unique Urban Orchard program.

The City recently added two more locations – De Pere High School and Samantha Park - and 24 new fruit trees to this growing intuitive. There are now six Urban Orchards in the City total, each featuring 12 trees.

De Pere’s Urban Orchard program first launched in 2016 at the suggestion of City Administrator Larry Delo. The first orchard was planted at Westwood Elementary School. Since then, five more locations have been added; with Urban Orchards spread throughout both the east and west side of De Pere.

Within the orchards themselves, there are four apple, four plum and four pear trees at each location. In all, there are a total of 72 fruit trees planted in the City’s Urban Orchards and the hope is to add far more.



“The target is to do two orchards per year, and literally have dozens of Urban Orchards throughout the City over time,” Delo said, adding “We’re striving to keep all of our Urban Orchards organic and locating orchards in areas that are accessible for residents to pick the fruit and enjoy it. One of the goals is to also have orchards planted in areas where they could potentially serve as a fresh fruit source for families who don’t typically have access to that type of fruit.”

Beyond this, De Pere’s Urban Orchards are also designed to serve other purposes as well, including revitalizing underutilized city property, creating neighborhood activity opportunities and promoting awareness on the importance of agriculture and nutrition.

“Urban Orchards have direct correlation with our community health initiatives; those being to promote healthy weight and nutrition,” said Deborah Armbruster, the De Pere Health Department’s health officer and director. “By promoting Urban Orchards, we are not only providing access to fresh, healthy and affordable food for the community through edible landscapes, these orchards can serve as a constant presence to raise awareness on nutrition. We want to promote more active, healthy lifestyles in our City.”

From kindergartners to high school students, De Pere Park Superintendent/City Forester Don Melichar has also been able to use the orchards as a nice teaching resource at schools.

“It’s been a great teaching tool,” Melichar said. “Showing students how to dig the holes, talking about the root systems, securing the trees and explaining the differences in tree species; this has created a lot of nice hands-on, up-close opportunities for students to learn.”

No City of De Pere funds have been used so far for the Urban Orchard projects. Instead, this initiative has been made possible through generous donations of money or time by local businesses and volunteer groups. Melichar is tasked each year with securing funding for the orchards and soliciting grants and volunteers from various organizations and groups.



So far, donations and funding for De Pere’s Urban Orchards have come from American Transmission Co. (ATC), Denmark State Bank and a Prevention Block Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Current locations for the Urban Orchards are Westwood Elementary School (planted in 2016), Braisher Park (2016), Voyaguer Park (2017), the De Pere Community Center/VFW (2017), De Pere High School (2018) and Samantha Park (2018). Volunteer groups maintaining the various orchards at these locations include ATC, teachers and students at Westwood, city hall and community center employees, and the agriculture department at De Pere High School.

The City has an Urban Orchard Team assembled to oversee the program, including evaluating and determining future locations. Any potential new locations need to be accessible to the public, and have close, available parking for visitors or for volunteers looking to water and maintain the orchards. Community suggestions on new locations are welcome. Members of the Urban Orchard Team include Mayor Mike Walsh; Director of Parks, Recreation and Forestry Marty Kosobucki; City Clerk-Treasurer Shana Ledvina; Senior Planner Peter Schlein; Delo; Armbruster and Melichar.

For businesses, groups, churches or organizations interested in funding, hosting or volunteering to maintain an Urban Orchard, contact Melichar at 920-339-8362 or email [dmelichar@mail.de-pere.org](mailto:dmelichar@mail.de-pere.org).

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*Caption Page 1: Students from De Pere High School help plant trees Tuesday, May 8 in one of the City of De Pere’s newest Urban Orchards*

*Caption Page 2: Staff from De Pere Forestry Department and volunteers from Denmark State Bank help plant trees at a new Urban Orchard in De Pere on Thursday, May 10.*