

## Planting for a **more** west Denver life **beautiful**



Jordan Granados, Roberto Torres and Joaquin Espinoza paint the banner for the front of the Kepner garden and fruit tree orchard.

Photos by Joshua Cole

### *Students, volunteers build Kepner fruit tree orchard*

By JOSHUA COLE

In 10-20 years, Miguel Martinez dreams of coming back to the Kepner Middle School campus, maybe with his children, and picking fresh, juicy, bountiful fruit off tree branches or tasty tomatoes from the vine. On a hot day, like many have been this summer, he imagines he would sit in the fruit tree orchard for shade, climbing the tree trunks or watching his children, cousins, nieces and nephews frolic.

But right now, in 2010, Martinez is merely planting the seeds – literally – for future sustainability, happiness, health and beauty. On July 1, Martinez was one of nearly 60 students and 50 other community members to plant 39 trees on a back corner of Kepner Middle School, near South Federal Boulevard and West Mississippi Avenue.

“It makes it look better so it won’t be all junky,” said Martinez, who recently finished eighth grade at Kepner.

The fruit tree project is sponsored by Revision International as part of its Re:farm Denver program. The international Fruit Tree Planting Foundation provided the trees, training and education. Re:vision International will manage the garden and

orchard, helped by volunteers from Livewell Westwood and Kepner Middle School.

Before putting the small trees in the dirt and digging irrigation ditches, Martinez and others picked up trash and dug up weeds on what had been an inhospitable section of the Kepner Middle School campus. The Denver School of Science and Technology in north Denver received 36 trees for its neighborhood as part of the same program.

Food from the orchard – when it matures – and from the adjacent vegetable garden will be put in student meals and given to the community when school is out. Fruit from the tree would be various varieties of apricots, plums, peaches, cherries, apples and pears.

So the trees can mature fully and upright, diners will have to wait 3-4 years before snacking from the fruit trees, an arborist said. Each tree, which is either a semi-dwarf or regular, would grow fully to about 8-15 feet in diameter and height in 10-20 years.

“Pretty soon there’s going to be a lot of fruits and vegetables,” said Martinez, whose favorite fruit is green apples.



Paul Grossette and Miguel Martinez dig a little ditch in the dirt for irrigation to the fruit trees they just planted.

psyche, how they make people feel better, more relaxed and better about themselves,” said Rico Montenegro, arborist with the Fruit Tree Planting Foundation.

The orchard is also a way to help the rest of the community, organizers hope. When children become involved, they learn activities that will become habits when they’re older. At school, they can learn proper ways to care for the orchard and the



Jesus Sanchez, 3, picks up a small green tomato while his sister Eunice Quinonez, 11, stands behind him at the Kepner Middle School garden. On July 1, 39 fruit trees were planted at the school.

The adjacent vegetable garden, which began last year and is also sponsored by Re:vision International, is already producing various types of vegetables.

Between the track and the baseball fields, at the far edge of the campus, next to power lines and behind houses separated fences of splitting wood, the place that would become the Kepner orchard was a wasteland for students and others.

Even with the new trees only a couple of inches wide at the trunk and about 5 feet tall, the orchard is already a symbol and icon for the neighborhood, volunteers proudly proclaimed.

Trees also make people feel better. They enrich the air by sucking in carbon dioxide and producing oxygen. And they're nice to look at and be around.

"Studies have looked at the positive effects that trees have on people's

nutritional value of eating fresh fruits and vegetables, especially compared with packaged food and fatty, junk food. Nutritionists recommend eating 7-8 fruits and vegetables a day.

"Some of the apple trees can live for 200 years," said Joseph Teipel, co-founder and president of Re:vision International. "It's perspective and foresight for these kids knowing that they can come back 30 years from now, and they'll still be helping the community. They're doing something that will have huge impacts even when they're gone."

Further, when children get involved, organizers say, they get their parents involved. Families that participate in Re:farm Denver plant a garden in their own yard. They must also share some of the food with other neighbors and recruit another household to start a garden.

Moreover, by working to plant the trees, by involving others in the community, neighbors are more willing to keep an area clean of weeds, graffiti and trash.

"It's cool to see the ownership they're taking," Teipel said. "Some of the kids said they can't wait to eat this because they worked so hard on it."