

Cherryhill families harvest neighborhood bonds at ‘walkabout’

By JOHN DUGAN

Families in Sunnyvale’s Cherryhill neighborhood kicked off the fall season a little early with their first “Harvest Walkabout” on Sept. 11, when about 40 residents gathered to sample vegetables and fruits grown in their neighbors’ back yards.

Organizers from the Cherryhill Neighborhood Association said they hoped the event would help create stronger neighborhood ties while promoting sustainable gardening.

About a dozen neighbors set up tables in their driveways, with the bounties of their harvest on display for others to try. Kathy Besser, who helped organize the event, produced cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, jalapeño peppers and even homemade pickles as the starting point on the tour.

“I think it’s important to foster this kind of neighborhood atmosphere, where kids can see how we interact and get to know each other,” Besser said. “Sunnyvale is a wonderful place to live, and we want to get to know all our neighbors and what they grow in their gardens.”

Participants braved warm late-afternoon temperatures to enjoy the day, which included walking to nearby Idylwood Care Center to sample some of the homegrown goods at the senior housing facility. Idylwood residents manage and harvest a large vegetable garden, use the goods to cook their own meals, then sell the extra bounty at local farmers markets.

Some neighbors made fresh lemonade and pumpkin chocolate-chip walnut cake, and others showed off the wide variety of flowers from their gardens. All the participants were excited to see such a strong turnout for the event.

“It’s important to be involved in the neighborhood and know the people who live around you,” said Nancy Sabbag, who has lived in Cherryhill on Valley Forge Drive for 30 years. “It makes for a safer neighborhood. And it’s great to see what everyone is growing in their back yards.”



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACQUELINE RAMSEYER

Nathan Cheng, 6, third from left, looks on with anticipation as Kathy Besser puts tomatoes from her garden into a bag for him at the first stop of the Cherryhill Neighborhood Association’s Harvest Walkabout.

Besser has been active in the neighborhood association since it launched three years ago. She used her professional graphic design skills to create a harvest walkabout logo that was plastered at every site, and her husband, Paul, was impressed with the result of her hard work in organizing the event.

“I love the idea of neighbors interacting with one another and becoming closer,” Paul Besser said, “and I think

something like this is better than a block party, because you’re walking around and meeting everyone instead of just sitting with the people you know. I think this could be a great tradition here.”

Besser and co-organizer Barb Grimes contacted Sunnyvale’s own Full Circle Farm for participation in the walkabout as well. Keith Fabisiak, a representative of the 11-acre working farm, drove up from Soquel to show support for the idea of locally grown, sustainably harvested foods right in people’s back yards.

“Anyone who’s grown their own vegetables knows you always have too much to eat yourself, so sharing the bounty is terrific,” Fabisiak said. “It’s impressive to have so many neighbors embrace the idea of sustainable agriculture and promote it like this.”

Besser, Grimes and the association are hoping this is the first of many harvest walkabouts. The group held a similar holiday walkabout last December where neighbors put out cookies, apple cider, coffee and hot



Residents of the Cherryhill Neighborhood Association visit Idylwood Care Center’s gardens during a stop on the neighborhood Harvest Walk-about, held Sept. 11.

chocolate for passersby.

They’re gearing up to plan this year’s second holiday edition—though they have the formula down

pat at this point.

Besser said Cherryhill neighbors hope the walkabouts spread to other neighborhoods.



Free lemons are offered at Kathy Besser’s home to participants of the Cherryhill Neighborhood Association’s Harvest Walkabout.