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## Local pastor launches garden project in Arcola

By **DIANE TEZENO**  
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Alan Jenkins, pastor of a Missouri City area church, doesn't mind getting his hands dirty to help area families in need.

The local pastor recently launched the "Garden Project," a community initiative to plant area gardens in the rural areas of Arcola.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, 24.3 percent of the city's 1,000-plus residents live below the poverty line.

The idea for the project came to Jenkins in a dream.

"I woke up in the middle of the night with a very simple thought to help people by planting gardens," Jenkins said.

In the weeks preceding his dream, Jenkins had been talking with individuals in the area to assess the needs in the community and remembers one resident saying simply, "You know, there are people out here that don't have enough to eat."

Jenkins, pastor of Life Pointe Church, initially approached area companies for help in providing food to the community, but received a poor response.

When the idea for a garden came to him, the Missouri City pastor wasted no time in gathering the items to make his dream a reality.

"I got four 16-foot pressure-treated pieces of lumber, a foot tall and two-inches thick, laid them on the ground and nailed them together," Jenkins said.

The pastor and church members then poured in fertilizer, high quality soil and planted seeds.

According to Jenkins, a lot of the clay soil in the area, referred to by many as black gumbo, does not drain well and is poor soil for growing foods.

"They are very excited, because it is a raised bed vegetable garden," Jenkins said. "I wanted to put in a concept that it is so simple that anybody can do it."

The cost to construct and prepare the pilot garden was about \$400, according to Jenkins, whose church covered the expenses.

Cheryl Duncan, a resident of Arcola, who is raising one of her grandchildren, was the first resident to receive a garden through the project.

"She has a heart big as Texas and I just noticed that she is a very generous person and is always trying to find ways to help people," Jenkins said.

Duncan, a Fort Bend Independent School District bus driver, met Jenkins through his church's "40 Days of Service" outreach project in which volunteers performed "Extreme Makeovers" on several homes in the area.

"That is the kindest man I've ever known," Duncan said of the local pastor. "He is the one pushing for things out here."

Duncan, also known for her generosity in the community, regularly feeds 10 to 20 kids at her home from her supply of Ramen noodles or donated foods she collects.

"I am not above begging if it will help someone in need or one of the kids in the area," said Duncan, who often receives donated items from friends and co-workers for area families.

The Arcola resident calls the church's outreach efforts "wonderful."

"There are a lot of hardworking people out here, but it is often not enough, so having this garden will not only help my family, but will help me feed other families as well," Duncan said.

The 11-row pilot garden, planted by members of Life Pointe Church right before Hurricane Ike arrived in the area, contained tomatoes, lettuce, greens and a variety of other vegetables.

"I am so blessed, people don't understand, I may not have all the wants, but I'm blessed," Duncan said.

The Arcola resident not only feeds area families with items from her garden, she also planted brown cotton from a relative in Arkansas as a conversation starter.

"A lot of people have never seen brown cotton, so I planted it just to show people and also to send to schools for show and tell," Duncan said.

Duncan is preparing to plant vegetables for a spring garden, including cucumber, squash, carrots and tomatoes.

"This garden is helpful to kids, they are eating fresh vegetables with no preservatives, they can pick it and eat it tonight.

"In the summer, I won't be driving the bus and will not be making that much and [the garden] will help me to feed the kids. Duncan said.

"One row of carrots could help 10 families in here, and 20 to 30 heads of lettuce could feed even more."

She also involves area children in planting and picking vegetables from the garden.

"Everyone likes it and it is a learning process to get kids involved and show them how to plant their



Beginning stages of Life Pointe Church Garden Project.



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own food if they need to survive," Duncan said.

Jenkins and church members are currently planting a second garden at a home of one of Duncan's relatives.

"Anyone that wants to fund one of those gardens can contact us and we will spend all [donated monies] on the garden," the Missouri City pastor said.

Right now the economy is affecting people, even churches, Jenkins said.

"There are always people who are struggling and need help and right now obviously is harder than before, we just need to help each other and we can all get through it."

The Life Pointe pastor believes it doesn't take a lot to have an impact in the lives of others.

"You can't help everybody, but you can help somebody," Allen said.

For more information or to donate to the Garden Project, contact Jenkins at 713-501-5245 or visit [www.yourlifepointe.com](http://www.yourlifepointe.com).

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