

**Welcome to the Reading Garden**  
**Paula Waak**  
**Library Manager - Hutto Public Library**

On Saturday August 6<sup>th</sup>, Chris Gordon from Boy Scouts of America Troop 190, finished his Eagle Scout Service Project called the Reading Garden at the Hutto Public Library located at 205 West Street. "I had been a teen volunteer at the Hutto Public Library for the past two years," said Scout Chris Gordon. "As a Boy Scout, I had been looking for an Eagle Scout project that would be a benefit to our city and community. The librarians mentioned that they wanted to build a reading garden at the library and I asked if I could lead that project for them. It was a great experience and one that I am very proud to have done."

The project was made possible by grants, donations, volunteers, and teamwork from City of Hutto departments over a 15 month time span. The goals of the Reading Garden Project are as follows: 1) Beautify the land located behind the library; 2) Create an area for native plants to grow; 3) Provide a habitat for monarch butterflies; 4) Provide an area outside for library programs and events; 5) Educate patrons about plants and butterflies; and 6) Provide a recreational activity for local gardeners. The area that had years ago been a parking lot for the old Hutto fire station with now only 2 inches of soil over road base will be a great space for the library to hold story time and other educational programs during the cooler fall, winter, and spring seasons. Though trees cannot be planted in this spot for shade due to the road base under the shallow soil, the library hopes that either through future grants or donations it will be able to acquire a sun shade over the seating areas so it may be used during the summer.

Library Assistant, Susan Misiti planted the idea for a Reading Garden back in May of 2015. "Originally I wanted the library to participate in the Hutto Adopt-a-Spot Program. I thought through the program, it would be a great opportunity for the field behind the library to be beautified," Misiti says. The library met with the coordinator for the program and started planning for a way to have the teen volunteers and Homeschool @ the Library group participate in an educational gardening project.

In June of 2015, landscaping timbers were donated to the library to mark off the gardening area. Within the timbers, teen volunteers and library staff laid down cardboard and mulch gathered for free from the Williamson County Landfill to help begin the process of breaking down and enriching the soil for future plants. Misiti also visited the local Hutto Starbucks to pick-up bags of used coffee grounds to place in the



soil for added nutrients. One month later in July, Misiti created two Master Garden Design Plans with lists of native plants that would require little maintenance and could handle the Texas heat.

Challenges began to arise in August of 2015 but the library received help from a variety of groups. The Parks and Recreation Department helped kill some of the invading weeds and bugs in the planting zone. The library needed to find a way to water the plants and the Public Works Department made a great donation of 3 rain barrels. The barrels would be used to provide water for the plants and help educate youth about water conservation for the project. The library contacted Girl Scouts Troop 880 who agreed to help paint the rain barrels in the winter season. Unfortunately, that same month, the library discovered during a story time event outside that the soil was only a few inches deep and underneath was the road base from the old fire department's parking lot requiring a raised garden bed.

It was in October when Misiti fortunately found on Craigslist a resident in Hutto who was donating limestones for building projects. The library quickly contacted the Hutto resident, Veronica Bernal. Misiti and Library Manager Paula Waak made 3 trips to Bernal's home to load the rocks into the library's bookmobile, which were then unloaded by Library Assistant Tanya Bechara and teen volunteers. Originally, 70 rocks had been donated to the library's Reading Garden by Bernal, but at the end of the project, a total of 120 rocks were donated and used to complete the project. The limestones not only saved the library money but also added beauty to the raised garden bed and a border for the seating area.

Months went by as the library planned on how it would construct the raised garden bed as resourcefully as possible since the library's staff of 2 full timers and 2 part timers is small and the budget was already planned and limited with a priority for enhancing the library's book, video, and online collection of items as well as normal annual programs. It was not until February when the library created the Reading Garden webpage at [www.huttotx.gov/library](http://www.huttotx.gov/library) in hopes to draw in more support from the community. In March, the library received a donation from Lowe's in Hutto and later more donations from the Lowe's Small Grants Committee to the Friends of the Hutto Public Library for the Reading Garden Project. A new Reading Garden Committee was also created during that month. Native Plant Society of Texas, Williamson County Chapter, Cindy Stone became the first committee member to work with the library. Later Master Gardener Della Owen became a committee member. Library Assistant Lisa Riggs suggested the project would be great for an Eagle Scout. On March 30, 2016, Gordon submitted the Reading Garden for his Eagle Scout Service Project and the dream began to take shape.

In April, the Public Works department helped level the field for the Reading Garden. Then the department picked up 2 pallets of soil donated for the project from Home Depot in Hutto and delivered it to the library. Local Hutto resident Jason Brindza volunteered his equipment and his time to help mentor Gordon and his crew of volunteers on how to construct and mortar a raised garden bed. Once the garden bed

was created, Gordon led his crew in adding the soil, a soaker hose, and mulch on top. Next Misiti and Stone donated native plants to the garden.

The rainy season kicked in high gear during May and June delaying the project. It was in August when all plans and volunteers were set back into place. The landscaping fabric, gravel (discounted by Lowe's for the Eagle Scout Service Project) and benches were to be added in one day. A quick monetary donation was made by the Friends of the Hutto Public Library to ensure that enough gravel was purchased for the seating area. Gordon organized another crew of volunteers to meet him on Saturday August 6<sup>th</sup> and they finalized the project within 2 hours.

"We quickly posted pictures taken on August 6<sup>th</sup> from the Gordon family onto our Facebook Page. It was amazing to watch how many people loved the project. The Reading Garden pictures are one of the most engaged posts on our library's Facebook with over 1,100 views and 93 positive reactions!" as highlighted by Waak. The Library Manager explains that she and Riggs plan to have an educational petting zoo out by the Reading Garden in the fall for story time as well as engage the Homeschoolers on how the rain barrels work. Other ideas include having community members decorate bricks by painting them to look like books to decorate the garden. A sign will soon go up recognizing all involved in making this project possible this month.

Community members interested in volunteering or being a part of the Reading Garden Committee are invited to contact the library at 512.759.4008 or email [paula.waak@huttotx.gov](mailto:paula.waak@huttotx.gov).

