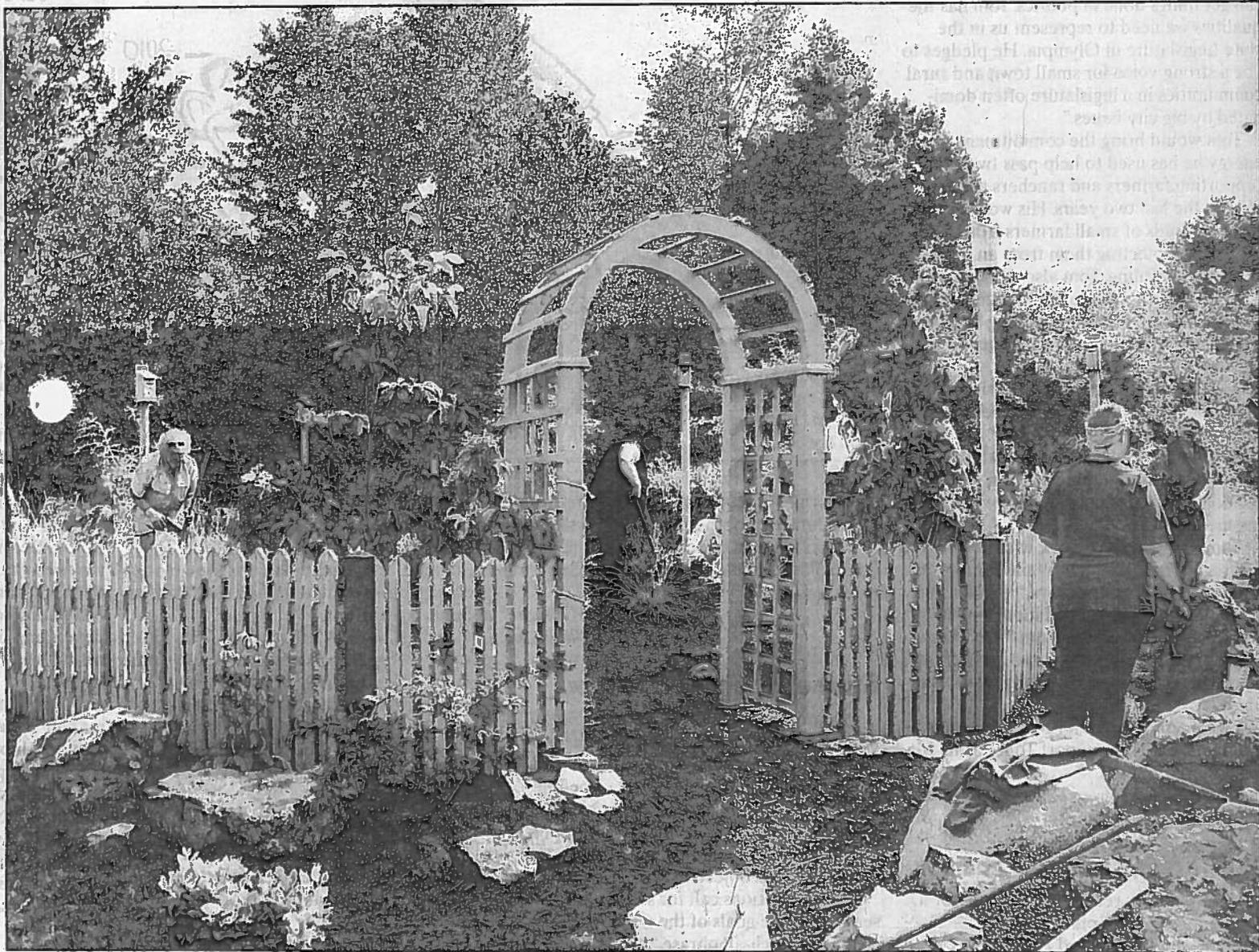


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Flutter by the garden



Submitted photo

Volunteers work recently on the butterfly habitat in a garden on the corner of Kulshan Avenue and North 26th Street in Mount Vernon.

Volunteers make Kulshan Creek garden more butterfly friendly

By AARON BURKHALTER
Staff Writer

MOUNT VERNON — Butterflies will find Mount Vernon just a little more hospitable this week thanks to volunteers and residents of the Kulshan Creek neighborhood.

On the corner of Kulshan Avenue and North 26th Street, volunteers from the neighborhood planted flowers known to attract butterflies Thursday morning — plants like lavender, Oregon grape and echinacea. The site is a fenced-in garden that is tended by families in the neighborhood. More volunteers will join a land-

scape architect today to plant even more.

Mount Vernon Police Officer John Gerondale said this is much more than a simple beautification project. It's an ongoing effort to keep neighbors invested in their community and keep crime down.

Gerondale said the community sticks together by working on this garden and a vegetable garden just a block away. As a result of about seven years of community building like this, crime has dropped about 30 percent, he said.

"All this collectively helps develop a better sense of pride," Gerondale said.

Gerondale said the area

gets about the same number of 911 calls, but they're typically for smaller crimes. He said it's because the community is stopping smaller crimes early and preventing larger crimes from ever occurring.

The garden was built several years ago but had to be moved to make room for improvement work by the Skagit County Public Utility District. The garden is now easily visible from the street, with a recently painted fence and tall poles each holding a birdhouse. Eventually, Gerondale said, volunteers will install a bench and several stools where people can sit and enjoy the scenery.

The garden has also helped Mount Vernon gain national recognition. The Skagit County Conservation District used this garden and other efforts to earn the designation "Community Wildlife Habitat" from the National Wildlife Federation.

Kristi Carpenter, public information and education coordinator for the Conservation District, said the designation was earned because of wildlife restoration projects at residences, businesses and parks in the area.

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Mount Vernon Police Officer John Gerondale