

## ***Library Learning Garden: A place to enjoy—a place to learn.***

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“If you’re going to do something, do it right. Don’t just do something to get it done, do it the right way.” This is just one of the things Mike and Alex Somers learned while fulfilling their service-learning hours. Last summer, Mike and Alex, brothers attending UW-Eau Claire and both majoring in microbiology, were home on break working at the Beaver Dam Community Library. The library’s Director, Sue Mevis, asked the brothers if they could take on a small gardening project, which they agreed to. But, before they knew it, the project turned into something much bigger than they expected!

The initial goal of the project was just to move the garden from its old location and bring it closer to the library. But after seeing the garden and how it was overrun with weeds and occupied by miscellaneous plants, Mike and Alex realized they wanted to do more; they wanted to create another section for the library. “Instead of people being restricted to inside we wanted to create a place they could gather outside and a place for teachers and kids where they could sit together and learn. We wanted to turn the garden into something people could really use.”

They wanted every aspect of the garden to provide a learning experience, so they chose plants that had different texture, leaves, and colors. Kids could play learning enhanced games, such as *find the plant that has this kind of leaf or this kind of texture*. They also purposefully put perennials in the garden so each year the kids and community members would have to replant them, whether it be planting them at the appropriate time of the season or starting them as seeds inside during colder weather and transplanting them at the start of summer. Along with providing a learning environment, they also wanted a garden that would be blooming all the time, so with the help of Brehm’s Nursery they chose plants that would provide color in the spring, summer, and fall.

Overall, the garden was a huge success, and both Alex and Mike received much thanks for the work they put into the garden. They even received a letter from Jeff Fitzgerald, speaker of the Wisconsin Assembly, recognizing their hard work. Both brothers said, “It was surprising and humbling actually, because we had no idea he knew about it. It was just a surprise that news about the garden had spread in that way.”

Both Mike and Alex agreed that the project was a fun experience and didn't even feel like service-learning! Neither of them had experience in creating a garden such as coming up with the layout, cutting bricks, using a sod cutter, or planting a garden. "Ninety percent of the stuff we did with the garden we'd never done before and all these new skills will be used in our own yards someday." And looking back on the experience they learned something they feel is important for all students to know: **"Don't think you can't do it just because you never have. Make the best with what you have and approach it even though you've never done it before."**

If this project sounds like something for you, be sure to check out the Service-Learning webpage for more information regarding posted opportunities: <http://www.uwec.edu/SL/>

**\*And if you'd like to see pictures of Mike and Alex's "Learning Garden" check out the album on our UWEC Service-Learning Facebook page!**