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By: Ezra Man

## Participants, ideas sought for garden

The steps to a healthier lifestyle often begin with a smart diet and regular physical activities, two areas that are about to be made much easier by a new Pauls Valley project.

Hoping to grow local support and involvement as spring approaches is Betsy White, current chair for the Garvin County Health Coalition, who is looking for those interested in getting a community garden established. All she needs is people anywhere in the county who might be interested in having their own spot and their ideas on how it could be done at a meeting this Thursday, Jan. 24 at 6:30 p.m.

"We're thrilled, there's a big push for nutrition in health," said White. "I really would like to get a large sampling of the community there."

Scheduled to be held in the Fiesta Room at Tio's, which is on the corner of Grant Avenue and Indian Meridian, the meeting will discuss the use of about an acre in a field near the restaurant, said White. The use of the land was recently offered by the Restaurant's manager, Burns Densmore, and it's important that those who wish to grow their own produce get involved soon since some of the planting will likely need to get started sometime in February.

All ideas on how to section off or shape the garden will be welcomed be it suggestions for care or eventually going with raised beds, said White. She's excited to include this in her own activities having only relocated to Wynnewood last year and for those who helped start the coalition when it was just a Pauls Valley organization a few years ago, it is satisfying to see this dream come to fruition.

"Once we have a better idea of who all's going to come and what they want we'll have a better idea of how to proceed...hopefully it will start out as ideas and brainstorming and go from there," said White, who added how it complements her work with the McClain/Garvin County Youth & Family Center. "It would be up to us to mark it off and how to use it."

However, the biggest gains of a community garden would be much more than families eating more fruits and vegetables; it could benefit the area economically as well, said White. One area in particular is the chance to qualify for grants by becoming a certified healthy community through the state's health department.

White has seen the benefits before, having helped Blanchard in recent years earn grants for things like a new community basketball court and it makes sense due to Pauls Valley already having events like annual health fairs. The money comes from the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust and could go toward areas like restoring sidewalks in town for those who enjoy walking or even bring in things that encourage kids to exercise like a skate park.

"It's little steps like this in small communities like Pauls Valley that can make it all healthier," said White, noting more meetings will follow in the future. "At this point it's truly in the beginning stages."

For more information about the project or how to become a part of it call White at 405-255-4147 or e-mail her at [betsywhite@mcclaingarvinyouthandfamily.com](mailto:betsywhite@mcclaingarvinyouthandfamily.com).