

Local experts collaborate on solution for erosion at Senior Services Plus

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GODFREY – While volunteering at Senior Services Plus in Alton, Thom Rhanor, of Godfrey, noticed damaging erosion near the greenhouse and decided to collaborate with other local experts to find a solution.

“SSP is doing important work for our community, despite a sharp decrease of state funding to support Meals on Wheels,” Rhanor said. “I saw an opportunity to contribute my specialized knowledge about soils and to leverage my employer, Monsanto, and the people I know at Lewis and Clark Community College to address the problem.”

Rhanor, a research associate at Monsanto, is the spouse of Allison Rhanor, an environmental educator at the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center, which is a collaborative partnership between Lewis and Clark, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Natural History Survey, that is dedicated to the study of great river systems and the communities that use them.

With the help of her husband Thom, L&C Restoration Ecology Program Coordinator Scott Moss and SSP Executive Director Jonathan Becker, A. Rhanor sought funding through an Illinois American Water grant designed to improve water quality on a watershed scale, while also involving the community and multi-organizational partnerships.

The team of experts proposed creating a system of urban stormwater controls at SSP, including a native plant rain garden to help mitigate the surface water runoff and erosion issues in an effort to reduce the negative impact to the on-site stream that feeds into the west fork of Wood River Creek.

“It was a perfect fit,” she said. “As for the grant writing process, John wrote up the SSP history, and Scott wrote up a design for the rain garden. Scott and I worked on compiling a budget, and Thom wrote up a piece about how Monsanto will be involved. I wrote the grant, compiling all the different voices.”

Their efforts were successful, and a \$3,500 grant was awarded to fix the erosion issue.

“This project is a great demonstration of collaboration between public and private enterprises, utilizing the unique resources of each partner to take another step toward an environmentally sustainable community,” T. Rhanor said.

Moss will coordinate with SSP and the contractors to ensure that the control feature ties into and supports the new building expansion, a second greenhouse which is being funded by Monsanto.

“SSP’s choice to seek out a collaborative solution should be commended,” Moss said. “If every project going forward attempted to address stormwater concerns on site with simple, sustainable goals, we would have fewer flooding issues in urban areas. A simple, modern standard, set by community ordinances, could eliminate all but the most

extreme urban flood events. The old standard of piping it off site as fast as possible just dumps it on others downstream. This project will show that there are better options that can easily be put into place.”

With the help of L&C students, a storm retention structure will be built. Plants for the bioswale and rain garden are already germinating and growing. The entire project should be completed sometime this fall.

Once this project is complete, SSP will serve as a permanent field trip location for the Swarovski Waterschool USA Mississippi River program, which is housed at NGRREC, as well as a real-life example of proper stormwater management for L&C students.

“Monsanto, L&C and all parties involved have been excellent partners who volunteer their time and expertise to improve our farm and help us grow,” Becker said. “They are professional and very giving of their time and experience.”

Annually, SSP produces more than 15,000 pounds of food to provide to the community. Daily, the organization delivers more than 525 Meals on Wheels and provides a variety of services for the more than 3,000 seniors who live throughout SSP’s seven-county region. The greenhouse allows SSP to provide organic food to seniors who may not otherwise be able to afford it.

To learn more, visit <https://seniorservicesplus.org> and www.ngrrrec.org.