

SEEDS breaks ground on expansion

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Brenda Brodie and Betty Kenan, mother of SEEDS co-founder Annice Kenan, observe sprigs of a fig tree cut as part of the breaking ground ceremony for the SEEDS facility expansion on Wednesday, April 10.

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DURHAM —

The SEEDS program began in 1994 to encourage community building through gardening. In keeping with that mission, the organization held a groundbreaking ceremony for a facility expansion that traded the more traditional shovels in the dirt for a symbolic gesture.

“Instead of shovels in the dirt, we’re transplanting figs,” said Emily Egge, executive director of SEEDS, during Wednesday’s ceremony. The organization’s building will be expanded from 3,200 square feet to about 5,000 square feet. A fig tree, which was showing the first signs of buds, sits in the path of the expansion area, so Wednesday visitors to the groundbreaking took clippers, cut off a few sprigs from the tree and placed them in a pot with soil for transplanting.

Some 40 cuttings have been taken and planted around Durham during the life of the tree, Egge said. “We want this tree to spread and grow in Durham, and feed as many people as possible,” Egge said.

Several founding members of SEEDS, which stands for South Eastern Efforts Developing Sustainable Spaces Inc., were on hand for the event. Brenda Brodie co-founded the organization with Annice Kenan. Brodie was at the event, along with Betty Kenan, who was representing her daughter Annice (who now lives in New York). Tom Kenan, brother of Betty Kenan, also was at the ceremony. Brodie praised supporters who stood with them in the early days when the area that now bursts with rosemary and other crops as well as figs, was a vacant lot.

"We brought chickens back to Durham," Brodie said, "and we'll have chickens here soon."

Construction on the \$1 million expansion is set to begin this month and be completed at the end of October. When complete, the expanded building will "meet the need of SEEDS' growing program" as well as the community's needs, Egge said. The expansion will include a new entrance that will face Elizabeth Street, where the fig tree now sits. Relocating the entrance will make the gardens the focal point of activity.

The architectural firm MHAworks designed the building expansion, and C.T. Wilson Construction Co. is in charge of the building.

The expansion will also include more classroom and working space, and a teaching kitchen, "where we'll be able to make that final connection between growing your food and getting it to your plate," Egge said. Food grown in the SEEDS garden is sold at the Durham Farmers' Market. Some also goes to the Durham Rescue Mission, which also helps with cultivation, Brodie said. The organization runs a program for teens called Durham Inner-city Gardeners. It also offers garden plots as part of its community gardening program. SEEDS teaches principles of sustainable agriculture, organic gardening and environmental stewardship to children, teenagers and adults.

Nathan and Wanda Garrett were original charter members of the SEEDS Board of Directors, and took some cuttings from the fig tree. Nathan Garrett said the program had helped improve young people's lives. "I've seen one or two where, as a result of seeing something grow, they get a new respect for life," he said.