

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Center for Small Towns

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

"Butterflies, birds and pizza toppings...what?!" The Children's Garden at the West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris is undergoing many changes lately; among them new Web sites, new gardens and new visitors.

Jenny Wermerskirchen, a junior at the University of Minnesota, Morris originally from Shakopee, is in the process of updating the Web site for the Children's Garden. Wermerskirchen is part of the Center for Small Towns technology team and is majoring in English with an intended area of emphasis in Digital Media Studies. "The Children's Garden had a small site and the new site will help bring more attention to the garden," said Wermerskirchen.

To start the process of creating an updated Web site for the Children's Garden Wermerskirchen had to first take pictures of the gardens. She met with Steve Poppe, horticulture scientist, at the garden with the instructions that she should "act like a tourist." Over 200 photos were taken. The new Web site will house the "overview" photos, and the ones that don't make it onto the main pages will be displayed in a "digital photo album," Wermerskirchen added.

The Children's Garden is located at the West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC), 46352 State Highway 239 in Morris and has many attractions. The total of eight gardens includes a bird garden with a bird bath, a butterfly garden, a native plain grass garden, an around-the-world garden with plants from all areas of the world, and, most inspiring, a pizza garden which holds all the ingredients necessary to build a delicious pizza. Wermerskirchen said that her favorite garden was the main garden where "streams of light" can be seen through the thick trees encompassing the flowers which grow in their shade. She added that the shade garden part of the main garden felt almost like a "secret garden." Children will also experience the exhilarating playground filled with everything a kid could possibly imagine, including a sandbox underneath the bridge leading them to a big twirling green slide. It will be hard to get them to leave.

The motto at the Children's Garden is to educate people about the important role plants play in one's daily life. The Garden goal is to teach children responsibility through plants. The WCROC Horticulture Vision is to establish a regionally recognized public research garden, to provide horticulture education and to offer an inspirational experience. Also, the gardens are simply there to provide a place of delight to children and others.

Many changes are occurring at the garden. New landscaping will go with new plants that are blooming and blossoming. It is always a surprise to go, because at different times of the year different plants are thriving and growing.

"Being part of this project was exciting and rewarding, there were times when I contemplated skipping class just so I could work more on the Web site," Wermerskirchen said. The updated Web site, which should be accessible at the end of fall semester, can be seen by visiting www.childrens.wcroc.cfans.umn.edu. When asked if there is anything else she wanted to tell people about the Children's Garden, Wermerskirchen replied simply, "they should go."

The Center for Small Towns is a community outreach program housed at the University of Minnesota, Morris and serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University of Minnesota. Small towns, local units of government, K-12 schools, non-profit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize the Center's resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. Their Mission is to focus the University's attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota's small towns with locally identified issues by creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students. For more information about these programs, contact the Center for Small Towns at (320) 589-6451 or visit www.centerforsmalltowns.org.

Contributed by Kristin Bennett'08, Student Administrative Assistant at the Center for Small Towns