

Boulder preschoolers, seniors get feathery neighbors

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Preschoolers and seniors will flock together to care for eight chickens that moved into a new Boulder coop Tuesday.

Blossom Preschool youngsters and Shawnee Gardens assisted-living center residents received the chickens through a program involving Urban Hens and the University of Colorado's Children, Youth and Environments Center for Research and Design. The program is designed to nurture intergenerational relationships and spread sustainable-living awareness, said Willem van Vliet-, CYE director.

The 48-square-foot coop - designed and built by CU environmental design students to withstand Boulder's high winds and snowstorms and to keep out predators - is located along the fence line that separates the preschool and assisted-living center.

Connie Keogh-Dwyer, founder and primary operator of Shawnee Gardens, 4755 Shawnee Place, said she hopes the new, feathered neighbors will help build connections between the elderly and the young.

On Tuesday, preschoolers squealed in delight as they gathered around the coop, fed and pet the chickens while seniors watched.

"It just makes sense to me," Keogh-Dwyer said. "There is beauty in relationships between people and the environment."

Urban Hens, a Boulder-based company supported by a Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation grant, donated the hens. In addition to learning about food sustainability, the seniors and preschoolers will share the farm-fresh eggs, which - according to Urban Hens co-founder Wynn Martens - contain less cholesterol and fat and more vitamins A and E, omega-3 fatty acids and beta carotene than commercially produced eggs typically found in supermarkets.

The Shawnee Gardens chicken coop is the second Urban Hens coop in Boulder. The first, installed two weeks ago, is the North Boulder Egg Cooperative near Alpine Avenue and 14th Street. Seven neighbors contribute to the care, protection and cleaning of six chickens that occupy the coop.

"It's already very successful," said Mary Young, one of the neighbors who keep the hens.

By fall, Urban Hens hopes to sell chicken-keeping starter kits at local farmers' markets - complete with ready-to-make coops and instructions on how to keep a successful flock - to integrate more chickens into urban areas.