School’s garden plants seed of future business

By Lisa Pahl

From the seed of an idea, a new community garden venture is set to grow in Mt Barker.

St Francis de Sales College has joined forces with the Mt Barker and District Residents’ Association to develop plans for the garden on school land.

They hope to transform the vacant plot into a thriving enterprise that will complement students’ studies at the college’s new horticulture centre.

It will become the region’s first joint gardening venture between a school and community association and will allow students and residents to work side by side to grow fresh produce and learn new skills.

Association chairperson Dianne van Eck said the project followed on from an earlier push by the group for the development of a community gardens policy by the Mt Barker Council.

It also coincided with the school’s desire to retain community use on a parcel of land it acquired from the council for new sports fields.

“When we were looking for sites for potential gardens we thought it is hard to find a site that’s practical and where you have got amenities as well, so we thought about approaching a school,” Ms van Eck said.

“The idea is that the association helps establish the garden but the school students and horticulture teachers would have a really big part to play in that. It would be about teaching them gardening and also teaching them business management skills.

“Any program that helps kids understand where the food comes from and how to grow it, all of that’s got to be good for their future.”

The college’s business manager, Margaret Heath, said the garden project was an ideal fit for the school community.

“With a lot of the things that we are building or developing here, we are trying to keep that community focus,” she said.

Certificate courses

“The garden concept is about being a little bit more sustainable and for students to be able to see the growing process and eat what they produce.”

“The centre will allow us to run certificate courses in horticulture for our senior students and also studies as part of our vocational education and training pathways and flexible learning programs,” Ms Heath said.

“The garden will really fit in with that.”

Gardening expert Lolo Houbein, who wrote the popular book One square metre, has been advising the joint group on how to set up and run the garden.

Anyone looking to join the community garden can call Ms van Eck on 0412 417 774.