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going out: EVENT

Pushing marigolds instead of meth

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SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Two blocks away from the largest transit hub in Western Canada and a half-block from a major distribution point for crystal methamphetamine, the ground has opened up. Into its hungry mouth dedicated volunteers, such as former cocaine and alcohol addict Shawn Kelly, 41, have finished shovelling truckloads of sand and gravel to form a sturdy base for growth.

"I'm in it to win it, from the root to the fruit," Kelly says with a laugh, borrowing a Vietnam battle motto for his personal recovery mission.

Turning a back-alley meth hangout into a marigold-filled playground is no small task, but the neighbourhood southeast of Commercial and Broadway is tickled green by the ground already broken by the My Own Back Yard Community Association.

M.O.B.Y. has secured a 10-year lease (for \$10) on three adjoining strips of city and TransLink property. It will also receive \$45,000 from Capers' 2007 Living Naturally Fair fundraiser to build an adjacent playground.

The M.O.B.Y. idea sprang up three years ago during Jason O'Brien's morning breakfast, when he got sick of looking out his kitchen window at an overflowing TransLink dumpster on the property next door. "Binners would rip open bags and toss them onto the property and crows would scatter trash everywhere," he recalls.

The land is now enclosed by a rustic wood fence and laid out with water lines and outlines of 45 honeycomb-shaped garden plots (O'Brien, a 30-year-old Emily Carr grad, wanted a better aesthetic than the rectangle). The community garden is doing more than just taking over a decrepit laneway: TransLink hopes that it will improve public safety, since the company plans to open a south entrance to Broadway Station in the coming year.

M.O.B.Y. will host a celebratory return-of-the-land block party at the site tomorrow. The all-day event features a free barbecue, a street-hockey tournament, a cob-building workshop ("hands down the best foot massage you'll ever have," O'Brien claims), local bands and a drum circle to close the event.

The M.O.B.Y. garden's public opening is tomorrow, 11 a.m.

to 9 p.m. 1700 block of East 11th Avenue. For information, call

Jason O'Brien at 604-736-6457.

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