

## **Educator's projects include transforming courtyard into garden**

**By Hillary Eib**

Mike Hotz is a former science teacher. He taught for 17 years, beginning in 1997, at Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kan. It was during this time that Hotz was involved in transforming a courtyard into a garden.

He was challenged in 1999 to reconstruct the school's courtyard, which consisted of grass and trees, into a functioning space. He then challenged his students with the task he had been given. To help finance this project, the students presented their ideas for the future space to Kansas University.

Originally, that university was going to give out three grants, but it ended up giving out 20.

In an effort to raise extra money for the space, Wyandotte High School sold bricks, upon which people could have their name engraved. This idea did not work out and they applied for more grants.

In time, the space was turned into a garden with rose bushes, wildflowers, other plants and vegetables.

“Students could bring the plants home to their families,” Hotz recalled.

Hotz also became involved in water quality grants. These grants were given through the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Forest Service. They helped develop a long-term project.

In 2015, Hotz won the Presidential Environmental Education and Innovation Award. To receive this award, a person has to be nominated by the principal, a student and another professional. Each year, there is a winner from each EPA region.

Hotz flew to Washington D.C., to accept and receive the award for his work in environmental impact and education, as well as the projects he did to improve water quality and to reconstruct and repurpose Wyandotte High School's courtyard into a garden.

Wyandotte High School was honored as the first Kansas Green School around 2006. After Hotz accepted the award on his school's behalf, he was asked by the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education to serve on its board.

Later, he was asked to be secretary of that board, where he served for two years. Then, he was elected as its president.