



Church member Bob Schulte came up with the idea for the gazebo at Valley UMC and is overseeing the project.

Outdoor Praise Project

A place open to anyone, anytime to worship

By Dawn Sagario Pauls

Driving along Ashworth Road in West Des Moines, you may have noticed the gazebo sitting on the grounds of Valley United Methodist Church, near 42nd Street.

The structure is just one component of the church's Outdoor Praise Project, which aims to offer a serene place where anyone can come to worship, anytime they wish.

"We just want to reach out to the people within the area and provide a service," says church member Bob Schulte, who came up with the idea. "So I was thinking, why not bring the church to the community instead of them coming to us? We're just providing a place for

them to basically worship God on their own time."

In addition to the gazebo, there are plans for a fire pit, patio, lamps, walkways and landscaping, Schulte says. There will be stairs connecting to the sidewalk on Ashworth Road, and some coming off the church parking lot.

There are people who have never been in a church and may feel intimidated, threatened or afraid to enter the structure, says Pastor Ken Ferguson. They hope this outdoor area gives people a comfortable space to get in touch with their spirituality.

"We try to do everything we can to make it less scary to get to know us and to get to know God,"

Valley United Methodist Church

4201 Ashworth Road
(515) 225-8128
www.valleyumc.org
Worship services
Sunday, 9:30 a.m.

been instrumental in the project, he says.

They held one outdoor service at the gazebo last year and would like to have at least one a summer going forward, Ferguson says.

Schulte says the plan is to install the fire pit this year. When completed, the area will have an amphitheater-like feel.

This summer, they hope to offer free outdoor movies. In the future, people may be able to rent out the grounds for events like weddings.

"Anybody can come in and enjoy the grounds and lift up their burdens to Jesus," Schulte says. "If one person lifts up their burdens and changes their life, then I think it's money well spent." ■

Ferguson says. "This is for the community."

The church held a capital campaign and raised \$50,000 for the project, Schulte says. They've been able to cut costs thanks to members volunteering their manpower and skills. Henry Wood oversaw construction of the gazebo, and Dave Stensrud and Tom Midkiff have also