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Greene Acres Community Garden grows lasting local ties

by **Laura Straub**

The members of Greene Acres Community Garden in Broadview Heights are more than a group of individuals with an interest in gardening and a few green thumbs. Each plot holder in this local gardening space is part of a growing community.

“It really is a community,” said Mike

Vantusko, president and garden coordinator. “There really are some great people.”

The seed for the garden was first planted far from Broadview Heights, when local business owner Bob Greene was abroad.

“When he was traveling Europe, he saw these kinds of gardens and thought we could have one,” said Vantusko.

Greene returned home and joined forces



John Goshorn, part of the Hunger and Harvest Task Group, marks the garden's donation progress on a meter.



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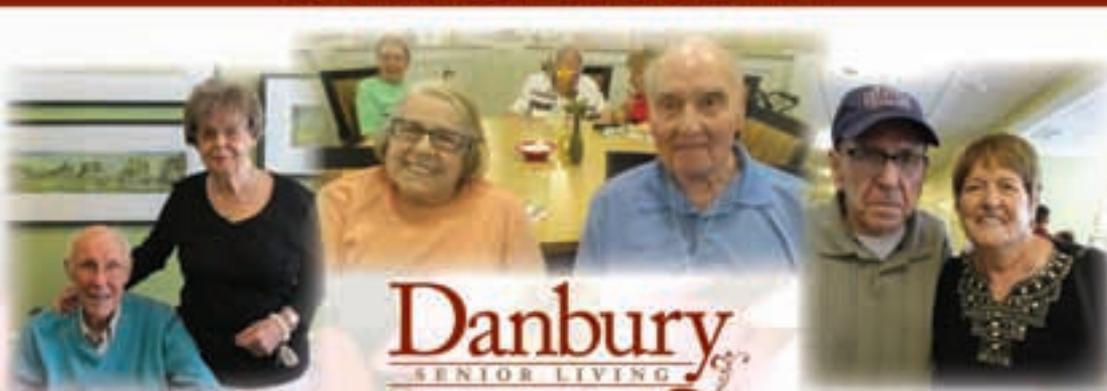
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with the local government and the Chipewewa Garden Club to make it happen.

The first stakeholder meeting took place in October 2012. At this meeting, Greene, the city of Broadview Heights and Chipewewa Garden Club members decided on the mission, vision and steps needed to make the community garden a reality.

They determined that Greene would lend the land, the garden club would oversee establishment and implementation of the garden and the city would provide

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Twila Goshorn weighs produce donated by garden members. Photos by L. Straub

labor and limited construction materials.

“The land is leased for \$1 a year to make it a legal lease,” said John Hernandis, founding garden coordinator.

From fall 2012 until March 2013, the forces behind the garden got their hands dirty. From testing soil to drafting bylaws, every detail of the garden was plotted out.

By June 2013, the beds were in place and the soil was tilled, and gardeners could reserve one of the 30 plots.

“From there, we have just exploded in membership,” said Hernandis.

Since then, the completely organic garden has grown to a 90-bed operation running as a 501c3. Now that the garden is established, the group is focused on growing and giving back to the community.

“Last year, we had some waste, but we didn’t really have the authority to step on anyone’s plot because they were paying dues,” said Vantusko. “We formed a committee called the Hunger and Harvest Task Group.”

The group, led by John and Twila Goshorn, sought to deliver any unharvested food – and then some – into the hands of people in need. They set a goal of donating 100 pounds of food to local pantries during the 2016 growing season.

“Are we going to rely on each gardener giving us some of their harvest?” asked John. “Yes, but let’s go beyond that, let’s designate plots.”

In addition to two plots and harvested donations from plot holders, the committee also waters and harvests plants for

donation while gardeners are away on vacation, as long as they utilize a “please water and harvest” sign.

As of July, the committee is more than halfway to its goal, donating more than 50 pounds of crops, including tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, potatoes, beans and squash to three hunger centers.

“We have three places that we’re primarily going to: the Broadview Heights Food Pantry, St. Vincent de Paul and South Hills Lend a Hand,” said Twila. “Our goal is to keep it local.”

Their goal is to continue to grow the

local impact of the program, and the garden, in years to come.

“It’s small, but every year it’s going to get better,” said Vantusko. “We’re always looking to do more.”

Whatever they accomplish, from larger donations to adding plots for more gardeners, they will do it as a community.

The Greene Acres Community Garden will host its quarterly meeting at the garden for the first time on Aug. 20 at 10 a.m. All are welcome to learn more about the organization, hear speakers and see and buy plants. ∞



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