

Community Garden Serves Many Purposes, Meets Needs

BY GEORGINA YOUNG-ELLIS

Large, colorful signs greet visitors to the Two Coves Community Garden. One beckons invitingly, "Enjoy our Garden"; another proclaims, "Earth is Life". Panels emblazoned with giant, Warhol-esque tulips add a hip touch to the enclosure. Inside lies a patchwork landscape dotted with colorful blooms: poppies, pansies, daisies, roses, lilies, daffodils and morning glories, some planted purposefully in neat beds and other growing wild, lending their cheer to the gardeners who labor persistently on their designated bits of land, each with their own reason for participating.

Vanessa Hall, a lifelong resident of the area, has designated her garden plot as a memorial to her grandparents, Willis and Sally Jones, and to her mother, Dolores Smith. She chose the spot because it's situated near the phone booth where her grandfather used to station himself like a neighborhood sentry and oversee his family as they went out in the morning and returned in the evening. She lives in the nearby Astoria Houses and her grandparents were among the first six families to move in, back in 1951. She tells how the community used to be like a family—there were baseball teams for the kids and diners and barbershops where folks would congregate. But then the stores and homes were torn down to be replaced by impersonal buildings and unpopular businesses, and the area deteriorated. In her lifetime she has seen the 25,000-square-foot triangle of land that is now the Two Coves Community Garden, located at the junctions of Astoria Boulevard, Main Avenue, and 8th Street, undergo

many metamorphoses, from a garage and a children's playground, to a grungy deserted lot to a Parks Department capital project assisted by Goodwill, and finally to its present incarnation. In her opinion, the community garden is bringing the neighborhood back together again, beautifying the area and unifying neighbors whose interest grows as they see others get involved. Another longtime resident, Beverly McKinney, is making her plot of carefully arranged flowers a memorial to her two brothers.

The majority of the gardeners use their spaces for growing food. Crops such as parsley, radishes, lettuce, tomatoes, beets, kale, squash, strawberries, cabbage and corn are burgeoning under their loving care. Sarah Copeland and Andras Gipp tend a beautifully organized plot of summer greens. Copeland explained that while the greens take hold, they will plant potatoes and garlic beneath. "They'll do their magic underground while we wait for the greens to mature," she said, going on to remark that neither she nor Gipp gardened growing up, though they're both from farm families. Gipp shared that his family farmed community land in Hungary for generations and that his mother won awards for the most beautiful gardens, giving him high aspirations for his own.

Rebecca Tuffy brings her young daughter, Elly, along to help in their vegetable plot because they live in an area of Astoria that is completely built up, with no natural places for her daughter to enjoy. "It's a perfect way to get some green space for the summer," she said.



A wide variety of flowers, fruits and vegetables grows in the Two Coves Community Garden.

Site Coordinator Garrett Ramirez' enthusiasm is catching. He talked about the garden's collective vision for the future. He said that as people continue to work on their own plots, ideally they will be also working towards developing a communal area to fill the need for horticulture and environmental education and related events. He stated that recently the garden won an award from the Citizens Committee for New York City, and that now organizers are trying to gather additional material support, especially from the City Council. He said that with more funding, an irrigation system, permanent storage structures, classrooms, shaded areas, and perhaps even a stage and a greenhouse could be built. Though the garden has much potential and many possible uses, Ramirez wants the focus to remain on growing food, especially in the light of rising

food prices. "There's nothing else like it going on in the neighborhood," he noted.

Acting Treasurer Emily Compton said that it's exciting to see the different ideas people bring to the space and how it all comes together to form a community. Indeed, there is no lack of creativity in the various ways the gardeners have chosen to decorate, divide and display their plots. No matter what the reason, anyone willing to put in a little time and effort is welcome to get involved, and plots for the growing season are still available. For a \$20 yearly contribution, each gardener assumes responsibility for a 10 by 10 plot that they clear and tend themselves, though tools, mulch and compost are kept on site for use. The garden is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. every Saturday and Sunday during fair weather.

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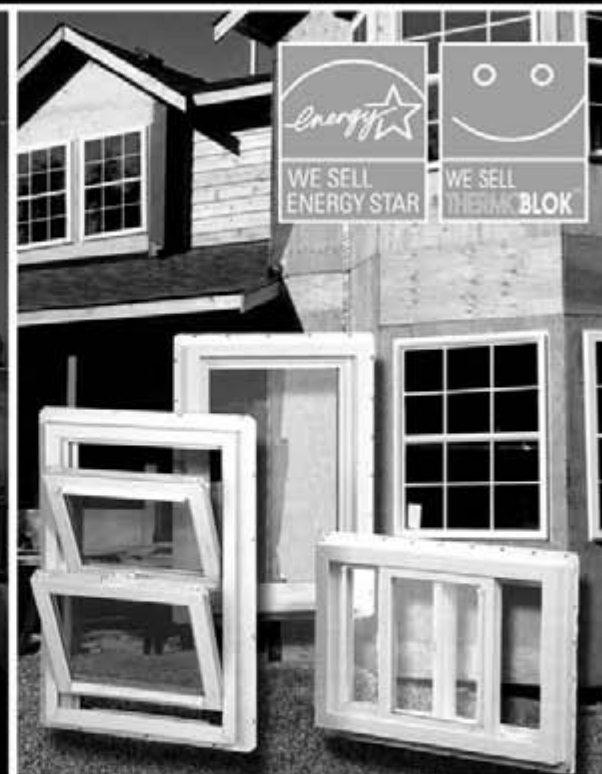


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