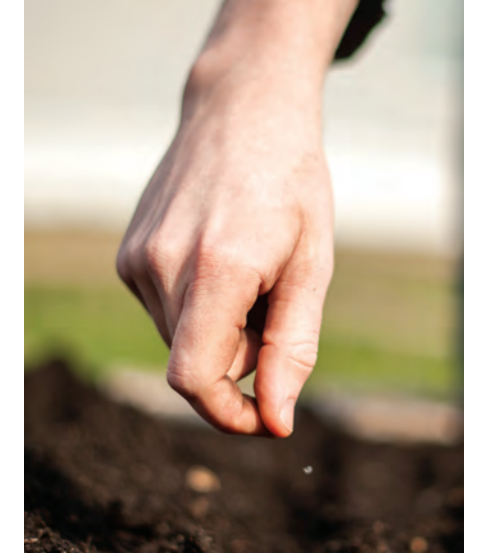


FIELD OF *Greens*

By Ellen N. Woods

Photography by Ed Pfueller

A new community garden on Catholic University's campus fosters fellowship, service, and relaxation.



One by one, the lead gardeners introduce themselves and display their white paper bags of seed.

"I'm Andrew. I've got onions."

"I'm Torey. I've got kale."

"I'm Angel. I've got mustard greens."

"I'm Kevin. And I'm the mixed bed."

With a Bible in one hand and holy water in the other, Rev. Jude DeAngelo, O.F.M. Conv., University chaplain and director of Campus Ministry, blesses the bags of seed and the soil where they will soon be spread. Invoking the Parable of the Sower, he leads a prayer for Catholic University's new community garden.

"Choose whichever vegetable you feel drawn to," says senior biology major Amanda Finnell of Hampton, N.H., president of CUA's Green Club, to a group of volunteers gathered behind Curley Hall. The seeds being planted on this chilly Saturday morning in March have been selected for their hardiness and quick growth. The produce should be ready to harvest in about 45 days, right before Commencement.

The volunteers scatter among the eight raised beds that many of them helped build in December during the garden's groundbreaking. They rake the existing soil, adding new top soil and compost.

Suzana Saric (B.C.E. 2011) has come from New Jersey. "I wouldn't miss this," says Saric, who served as Green Club president during her senior year. Now she works for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Superstorm Sandy Recovery projects. "This University is so much about sustainability. We talked about a community garden while I was here. I'm so pumped to be part of this."

Sarah Francis Williams, a sophomore

musical theatre major from Atlanta, is a resident assistant in Regan Hall. "As RAs, we like to encourage our students to get involved in service opportunities, to meet new people, learn new skills, and to have fun. This activity offers all of that, and what a great way to start the spring season."

Freshman Anna Klinker, from Richmond, Va., has joined her RA for the seed planting. "We have a garden at home. Spending time in a garden is very therapeutic. I miss it. So I was excited to help out."

Andrew Templon, a senior history major from Pennington, N.J., likes being outdoors. "My dad and I hike a lot. I'm drawn to all things green," says Templon, who is vice president of the Green Club. "It's great to be out here getting my hands dirty. I love that the garden is drawing people from all over the University. But the most exciting part is that the produce will be donated to a food bank."

Templon is one of eight lead gardeners who have been trained by staff in the Office of Facilities Maintenance and Operations. The leaders have come prepared. They've thought of everything — just about.

It's time to water the tiny seeds that have been planted in neat rows in each of the beds. "You don't want to over water or wash away the seeds," says lead gardener Kevin Dolan, a senior history major from Rochester, N.Y. The aspiring farmer tells the volunteers, "You really just want to mist the soil."

But all they have is a hose.

So the volunteers conspire to develop a "watering mechanism." They find several orange traffic cones and turn them upside down, then put plastic bags over the narrow openings. They poke a few small holes in the plastic bags and fill the cones with water. A

steady stream of droplets flows through the holes and the community gardeners begin the process of nurturing their crop.



Community gardens can be found in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and they are growing in popularity. The benefits of community gardens have been well documented. According to the American Community Gardening Association, community gardens beautify neighborhoods, reduce crime rates, preserve green space, create income opportunities and economic development, provide opportunities for recreation and exercise, and stimulate social interaction and self-reliance.

For food banks across the country, community gardens are becoming an important vehicle for providing equitable access to nutritious food.

The importance of community gardening has been recognized at the national level. The White House Kitchen Garden has become a tool for schools across the country to teach families about nutrition and sustainability. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has funded more than 1,900 community gardens across the United States through its People's Garden initiative.

During her junior year, Finnell attended a national conference in Washington, D.C., with other Green Club members. The conference was sponsored by Power Shift, a group dedicated to youth involvement in climate issues. She heard Al Gore speak and she attended a session on the benefits of community gardening.

"I got the bug and knew that's what I wanted to pursue in my senior year as president. When it comes to environmental

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— Amanda Finnell



protection, the University is doing so much. The conference helped me focus on one area,” says Finnell.

She met with Chris Vetick, CUA’s assistant director of grounds and fleet maintenance, who helped Finnell select a location that had plenty of sunlight, open space, and access to water. He provided guidance ranging from equipment safety to selection of plants. Vetick and his staff trained the volunteers.

Finnell also met with Emmjolee Mendoza Waters, associate director of community service with the Office of Campus Ministry. “Emmjolee gave me tips on how to organize a project of this magnitude. Partnering with Campus Ministry made so much sense because the garden is a perfect service project.” Campus Ministry and the priests living in Curley Hall even offered to help maintain the garden in the summer months.

The Office of Campus Activities also helps sponsor the garden, providing organizational and publicity support.

“The entire CUA community has been involved — faculty, staff, students, and alumni,” said Finnell. “This is all about our mission. We are in service to the community

by feeding the hungry and we are working as stewards of God’s creation.”

At the groundbreaking, President John Garvey noted the beauty of a garden “makes us aware of God’s creative activity in the world.” Finnell says that idea has guided the gardeners throughout the spring semester.



The deer fencing has been pulled off the garden beds and rolled into loose balls and now it blows across Curley lawn like tumbleweeds.

“Look at the size of that radish,” says an excited student who has come out on a Saturday morning in May to harvest the garden. She is pointing at a bright red radish popping up through the soil. “That wasn’t even there a few days ago.”

“The mustard greens have doubled in size since last week.”

“What do mustard greens taste like?”

Several students pull off a few of the green and purple leaves.

“It actually tastes like mustard. It’s spicy.”

“I want to get a picture of each bed before we start to harvest,” says Finnell. “Be

careful with my babies. Oh gosh, I’m having a moment.”

It turns out the large radish was a tease. As the harvest on that bed begins, it appears the students have a crop of “micro” radishes.

“We probably should have allowed more space between the seeds when we planted them or we should have thinned them out so they had room to grow,” says Dolan.

“It’s okay,” says Finnell. “This is a learning year.”

Heads turn toward Templon, whose bed has yielded no onions. He accepts the good-natured ribbing. “It’s a learning year,” he reiterates.

“We love your invisible onions, Andrew.”

The leafy greens, on the other hand, are abundant.

Pulling them bunch by bunch from the soil and packaging them for donation is tedious, but on this sunny Saturday of the weekend before final exams, the students call the process “relaxing.”

They are gathered around the beds, some on their knees, some sitting cross legged. The conversation comes easily: summer movies, Coke vs. Pepsi, off-campus

housing, best running routes in D.C., Commencement attire, jobs after graduation, and dream jobs.

Finnell grabs her cell phone to call for a pizza delivery. But first she takes in the scene. “I love the bonding,” she says to no one in particular.



A Campus Ministry van pulls up to Bread for the City on Seventh Street, N.W. Finnell is at the wheel. On board are Olivia Booth, a junior environmental chemistry major from Tampa, Fla., and Tiba Tavassoli, a junior civil engineering major from Great Falls, Va. These two Green Club members are poised to take over leadership of the garden as Finnell prepares to graduate and start her job with the Environmental Protection Agency, where she had previously been an intern.

It’s the first day of finals so the group is small, but their precious cargo is large. They’ve come to donate the first crop from CUA’s community garden.

Bread for the City is a Washington, D.C., nonprofit agency that provides comprehensive services including food, clothing, medical

care, and legal and social services to vulnerable residents.

Jeffrey Wankel, the organization’s urban agricultural coordinator, greets the young women at the front door. “Before you unload, would you like a tour of our rooftop garden?”

The group heads up four flights of stairs and opens a door to an urban oasis complete with honey bees and a tiny strawberry field.

“Our philosophy is to put as much control in the hands of the community as possible. Our clients maintain the garden,” says Wankel.

“What are the special considerations for a rooftop garden?” asks Booth.

“The dominant sunlight is a double-edged sword. We get 12 to 14 hours of direct sunlight up here, plus residual heat from the building, so we have to water twice a day. We’ve been known to splash people on the sidewalk below,” says Wankel.

“What are you growing here?” asks Booth.

“Eggplant. It loves the sun and yields a heavy produce. The problem is nobody likes plain eggplant. Education is an important part of our mission. We have gardening and cooking workshops. We show our clients dif-

ferent ways to prepare eggplant and other vegetables so that they enjoy what they are eating,” says Wankel.

“I love that your program includes education,” says Finnell. “And the commitment to social justice. That’s such an important part of our University’s mission, too.”

Later as the van heads back to campus during rush hour, Finnell says she is having “separation anxiety. But we really did find a good home for our produce.” Her melancholy moment is interrupted by Booth and Tavassoli, who are looking to the future.

“Maybe we should try eggplant this summer,” says Tavassoli.

“Next fall, we should add more beds,” says Booth.

“And a picnic table and benches,” adds Tavassoli. **CUA**

Web Extra: Visit cuamagazine.cua.edu to view a slideshow of CUA’s community garden and to get tips on fall gardening from Chris Vetick, assistant director of grounds and fleet maintenance at CUA, who specializes in horticulture and agriculture.