

Mayor's Column

March 6, 2017

With wishful thinking for spring on the horizon, the Village Green Committee met last week to further develop plans for the Village's first ever community garden. The brain child of Green Committee Chairperson, Mary Liz Mulligan and Committee Member and accomplished gardener, Dave Phillips, it will be so named the Giving Garden because all the produce will be delivered directly to local charities and food pantries. Our local Bronxville Rotary Club's generosity provided the "seed" money to make the Garden a reality and a truly charitable partnership.

The garden is just the latest initiative of our energetic Green Committee, long on ideas and vision but very short of manpower.

To date, the Committee has commissioned the County shredder to the Village multiple times, initiated a "Take Back Day" for the responsible recycling of electronics especially computers, collected gently used towels and linens for animal shelters, spearheaded the mulching in place leaf campaign, and most importantly galvanized the school and the Village to switch to organic fertilizers and cease using chemical pesticides.

Many of our fellow Westchester Communities; Pleasantville, Millwood, Chappaqua and Bedford have seen the need for sharing gardens and the growing of healthy food for those in need.

As an overview, it is estimated that 14.3% of our country is "food insecure" defined as living without reliable access to affordable nutritious food.

In Westchester County, one of the ten richest counties in the nation, 200,000 or 1 in 5 fellow residents fit this definition. It is sometimes a

hidden problem with epic outcomes. Without access to even remotely healthful foods, we have seen a dangerous increase in obesity, especially childhood obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. The days of donating cans of highly salted soups or sugar coated cereals have proven to be damaging long term.

Our garden has formed partnership with nearby charities and food pantries, and it will truly be a farm to table operation.

Our hope is that the Garden may be the galvanizing force to start a business to table “food rescue” in our Village.

Nationwide 30 – 40% of our country’s food is harvested and then lost, often through the supply chain. Healthful fruits and vegetables that may have a bruise or brown spot sit in the dumpsters. Items passed their “Best Buy Date” have the same fate even though products are safe and healthy. The date merely reflects the start of the cycle when some of the nutrients start to deplete.

Not only have our citizens been left needlessly hungry but labor has been wasted, soil depleted, fuel costs incurred, and billions of gallons of water lost.

Rotting food relegated to a landfill also produces methane gas which is twenty times more potent than fossil fuel emissions.

Recognizing the problem, our neighbors in Pelham/Larchmont have created a very successful template which to follow on the local level.

Called Local Harvest, it came about in 2009 after a mom doing a serving shift in the local public school cafeteria was dismayed at the quantity of food being thrown out on a daily basis.

Now seven years in operation, the group has public and private schools on board as well as supermarkets, restaurants, bakeries and country clubs. Over three million pounds of healthy food has been rescued thanks to a corps of 400 volunteers. An interesting side note, France

passed a law so named, “The Excess Food Act” which requires large supermarkets to donate all of their excess foods to charities. Our neighbors in Greenburgh are currently considering adopting just such an ordinance on the local level. Markets in our area that have been particularly active and generous in the sharing of “excess” food are Stop ‘n Shop and Trader Joe’s.

In Pelham/Larchmont, a delivery run is never more than an hour round trip and volunteers can share as little or as much time as they have and the cross section of age groups participating has been an added bonus.

In a world where we must think of potential liability even when doing good works, the danger of a lawsuit is nonexistent thanks to the Good Samaritan Act signed by President Clinton which hold all donors harmless.

Certainly the most shining example of a community early to the environmental needs/concerns of their citizens was Bedford.

Their initiative so named Bedford 2020 has as its mission to lead, organize and promote a community wide effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%.

Bedford uses the “petri dish” approach developing and piloting projects that can then be replicated and expanded throughout the County and beyond. Bronxville is currently looking into the many Bedford initiatives.