

# TOWN OF HUNTINGTON

## ROBERT M. KUBECKA MEMORIAL ORGANIC GARDEN

### BACKGROUND

The Town Board authorized the purchase of fifteen acres of land from the Hazeltine Corporation on January 12, 1971. In May of the same year a deed was signed and the land was conveyed to the Town.



Although no records can be found officially mandating the use of the site by the summer of 1972 the Community Garden Program was initiated with approximately 120 families actively gardening at the site. In 1987 a local law was adopted officially establishing the Community Organic Garden Program. Membership has grown over the years and today over 350 families garden at the site.

In 1972 the Town charged \$3.00 for residents and senior citizens were given a plot free of charge. Fees have increased over time and the current annual fee is \$25.00 for residents and \$15.00 for residents over the age of sixty-two.

In 1975 Readers Digest stated that Huntington had one of the first successful town gardening programs in the country.

The philosophy of the Community Organic Garden Program is that all gardeners use their assigned 20' X 30' garden plots to grow vegetables, flowers, shrubs, or ornamental grasses without the use of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and chemical fertilizers. To further this philosophy the Town provides composted horse manure and wood chips to the gardeners to use as natural, organic soil amendments and weed barriers.

A landscaped entranceway on Dunlop Road provides the only access to this secluded, environmental haven. A gravel access road runs through the property, dividing the 15-acre site into three areas for gardening. In addition to these three gardening locations the site contains several vernal ponds, densely covered with oak and maple trees. These areas provide natural habitats for a wide variety of wildlife.

## **GARDEN MANAGEMENT**

The garden is managed by two different Departments in the Town of Huntington. The Department of Environmental Waste Management handles the assignment of garden plots and the annual renewals of current gardeners. The Department of General Services handles all maintenance issues with Garden.

## **PROFILE OF GARDEN MEMBERS**

The general makeup of gardeners participating in the Community Organic Garden Program is a cross section of the entire Town's residents. Senior Citizens can be seen from sun up till mid-morning, avoiding the mid-day sun, working and then relaxing under the trees sharing coffee and tea and their many years of gardening and life experience. On weekends and during the week in the evenings, younger gardeners appear, bring the same enthusiasm to the garden as the seniors. Members view the garden as a community asset, providing attractive open space, as well as educational, recreational and nutritional benefits.



## **Clifford Soergel Memorial Outreach Garden**



The best example of this community asset philosophy is Clifford Soergel Outreach Garden, a roughly 1/3 acre section of the much larger Kubecka Community Garden, where garden volunteers grow fresh organic produce on Town dedicated garden land. This produce is then distributed to local charities and food banks to assist in feeding those in need. Started in the spring of 1989 this program has historically aided local charities including: Helping Hand Mission, Haven House, Bread of Life, and St. Hugh's Outreach Program. The late Clifford Soergel, a dedicated volunteer gardener, facilitated this program from its inception until his death in late September of 2005. For every one of those sixteen years the Outreach program under Mr. Soergel's guiding hand provided 5,000 to 6,000 pounds of fresh, organic produce to those in need.

The Outreach Program continued after Mr. Soergel's passing and was developed even further through the Town's partnership with [the Long Island Community Agricultural Network](#) (LI CAN). Staff and volunteers from LI CAN have begun reconstruction of the Outreach Garden. The new garden will continue to be a source of donated food, but will

also bring in new gardeners who need food for their families and children who will learn organic gardening skills.

LICAN's new plan for the garden includes both ground-level beds and raised beds, some of them to heights convenient for people in wheel chairs or who have difficulty bending. It will also include a fenced children's garden where students from the Oldfields Middle School, located a few hundred yards from the garden on Dunlop Road, will engage in a service project designed to teach them how to grow vegetables which will then be donated to food banks.

For many residents the garden provides a realistic opportunity to cut down on the rising cost of food. And for others it provides a needed break from the stresses of everyday life, a chance to unwind and enjoy the simple pleasures of life by getting back to nature at their "garden".