

Article 1.

How does your garden grow?

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Audrey and Ken Mochel started their tomatoes and pepper seeds early in their large Victorian home, making Ken wisecrack that they need another house just to live in. The gardening season of the Calvary Food Pantry Community Gardens starts. Audrey and Ken understand that with planting there is an immense task to feed the hungry on five acres of land, roughly the size three football fields behind the BOCES building in Aurelius. In partnership with the Calvary Food Pantry, the plot was given for the Mochels' use by BOCES superintendent Bill Speck, with the members of the BOCES board enthusiastically participating. Impressively, the Mochels do the planting using only New York state grants, private grants, and some very hard work and tenacity from students, volunteers and a genius planter named Quadir Muntaqim, who gives bi-monthly tours of the gardens. Now with BOCES' continuing gift, all Auburn food pantries will benefit from the Mochels' gardening expertise and establish Audrey and Ken as two of Auburn's Heroes for Hunger.

“Heroes?” The Mochels, both well-known professionals and senior citizens extraordinaire, gave up their retirement to volunteer and plant seeds for the hungry five years ago, and have never regretted it. Audrey, creative planner, and Ken, the master gardener in Cornell Cooperative Extension's program, are amazingly successful at what they do. Last year, even with drought and rainstorms, approximately \$12,000 dollars worth of vegetables like peas, peppers, cabbage and cauliflower were grown and given out to Auburn food pantries! We challenge anyone in America to top that!

Audrey said, "We have secret resources in our daily fight for hunger. BOCES students prepare the soil for planting until their school ends. We can plant our seeds. Then the rest of the season, we rely on volunteers and Quadir Muntaqim, our 'magician for hunger,' a juggler of time and space. He uses 20 hours of grant-supported work, a week, to cultivate 80 hours of growing time. He is invaluable. Furthermore, he and Ken share encyclopedic knowledge and can coax seeds to grow under any circumstance. We could not do what we do without him. We would like to hire him full-time. If the public wants to help, they can support our 'magician.' Quadir will be giving bi-monthly hour-long tours at the gardens starting May 17. Love gardening? Anyone can benefit from Quadir's expertise and watch the gardens grow. Tours will take you through the summer, every other week on Fridays at noon. ... Support Quadir or volunteer at the gardens.”

Call Audrey at 255-9133 for announcements of tours, volunteer schedules and details.

Planting and harvesting the gardens are monumental and magnificent feats. There has been no precedent here in Auburn for such efforts. No one can remember coaxing so much food for the hungry out of such little land. There are other nonprofit gardens in Auburn, but few benefit the community like this one. The Mochels' ongoing goal: “to be victorious over hunger by growing healthy food for all Auburn food pantries.” They are one of Auburn's unsung Heroes for Hunger.