

Article 4.

Mochels, other volunteers maintain Auburn's food pantries gardens.

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The gardens at Calvary Food Pantry delivered the first vegetables last week — cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce — harvested daily by Audrey and Ken Mochel and their band of hearty pickers, who are mostly volunteers. Nothing pleased me more than to see that by 2 p.m. the first day all the produce was gone, except the patty pan squash, which we call the “children’s squash.” (Audrey’s lectures with that squash bring children into the gardening process, as no other tool or persuasion can.) When Audrey, Ken and I went about setting up the gardens five years ago, based on the hard, backbreaking work of the Mochels, we had an idea what a colossal importance our undertaking was. Now our mission shows itself in the bright colors of all those vegetables.

Additionally, with this current crop, all five pantries in Auburn benefit because a portion of each picked harvest is given to them. Audrey and Ken’s hope for Auburn is that hungry people can eat just as well as anyone else. This work will continue until October when the earth cools, trees change and garlic is replanted (yes, it is an annual) and put to rest all winter. Then they will start all over again, sharing this bounty, developed from their sense of giving back, next year. They are Auburn’s greatest senior citizen volunteer couple! I challenge anyone to find volunteers doing this extraordinary type of work. You probably will not. With social media, know anyone who can top what they do? I don’t.

Audrey and Ken are the most visible example of volunteerism that touches lives, but I am surrounded daily by a volunteer group that's stalwart, exceptional and special. It takes a very strong sense of purpose to see, day after day, so many families suffering and often in emotional pain. Many of my volunteers have been doing this for years. Every day the pantry is open, with each volunteer having their own reason to help feed the hungry.

Many are from RSVP, the group of retired individuals, under the tutelage of Maryanne Kolo. Individuals like Mary Lou, Janice and Marge, as well as Kay, who answers the phones each week. They ask nothing in return, but they tell me that they have a sense they have accomplished something, giving help and comfort to people in distress. Their accomplishments are reinforced by the individuals around them who have the same purpose and goals.

We live in this historic town, where fellowship and volunteerism for the hungry is an act of faith. You must believe in the cause. For 28 years, most of them as a volunteer, I have worked for the hungry. In the early days, I had a sprinkling of volunteers to help me (some are still with me, like Al and Betty,) working out of a desk behind the furnace at Calvary Presbyterian Church. In the beginning we were extremely dedicated, but not as organized as we are today. A loose configuration of women and men who knew there was a need, we set out to plug a hole, to help hungry people, and we banded together as a professional organization. Helped by grants, we

created what you see today, serving more than 115,000 meals last year for 2,700 families in my area alone. I would not exist, now, without volunteers. No nonprofit organization in America would.

Given the climate in Washington, D.C., it will only get worse. Speak to your Congressional representative, to those who seem never to have had hardships in their lives. Ask them why they want to tear away a safety net, put in place years ago by a group of wiser, moral, honorable and righteous individuals. What would happen to my families? What would happen to my pantry? Furthermore, how will Congress be "saving money" taking away \$10 dollars per adult or child every month from needy people starting in October? This isn't the America I grew up in!

Thank anyone who volunteers in this historic, patriotic town. Countless individuals who touch lives and ask nothing but the satisfaction of giving to a cause they believe in. American heroes, all of them. Well done all, and thank you!

Coming events: CNY TomatoFest Sept. 7-8 at Emerson Park, and "Capt. Jack's" monumental ship at Halloween time.