

Love, food and community



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By Nate Smelle

Five years after the first seeds were sown by the initial Harvest the North gardening crew, enthusiasm for Bancroft's community gardens continues to grow. Orchestrated by a team of community activists working with the North Hastings Community Trust, the intention of the gardens is to establish a sustainable local food source while at the same time reducing income inequality. For the last few months manager of the Harvest the North community gardens Jo-Anne Reynolds has spent the majority of her time preparing for the growing season. From planting seeds and growing seedlings to constructing new beds, it is fair to say she has had her hands full. Motivated by her passion for local food and bringing the community together, Reynolds said she gets a great deal of enjoyment from the entire process. While in years past managing the gardens also required rallying a crew of community gardeners prior to planting the beds, she said this year was different.

?What I have really liked seeing this year is the ownership being taken by community members,? said Reynolds.

?This year it was such a joy to walk through the park and see people garden. A lot of them decided that they had been gardening in the beds long enough now, so they are owning that. We are seeing people actually invest back into the gardens.?

For example, Reynolds said one of the gardeners even took it upon herself to build and install a cage system to put on top of her garden bed to protect the plants.

Although most of the garden beds are located on public land, the Trust's executive director Jane Kali said it is important for the public to know that the food grown in the beds is intended for the families or individuals who take care of them. While some of the beds are intended to grow food to share with the community, she said considering the amount of work each of the bed's managers puts into caring for them, they do not offer the food to the public on a self-serve basis.

Having added more beds to the gardens this year, Kali said there is space available for more people to get involved. She recommends anyone interested in managing a bed to contact Reynolds at 613-332-3657.

Noting how the Town of Bancroft's Community Safety and Well-being committee acknowledges in its mandate that community gardens have the potential to improve the quality of people's lives, Reynolds said one of the things that has made the community gardens such a success is the diversity of community members collaborating on the project. She also pointed out that as enthusiasm for Harvest the North has grown, so has the number of garden beds throughout the community.

As key Harvest the North partners, Reynolds said the community of Woodview Lane can attest to this fact. At the start of the 2019 growing season, she said the Trust delivered new raised garden beds to the neighbourhood for community members there to grow their own food. Having taken on the responsibility of managing several of the garden beds, Reynolds said the Trust's Rural Outreach and Community Kindness program can also speak to the value of community gardens.

?The community of Woodview Lane continue to be key Harvest the North Partners and we will continue to support all the amazing things they are accomplishing there,? she said.

?Community gardens can do so much to enrich people's lives, and that's what Harvest the North is all about ? growing love, food and community.

For more information on Harvest the North contact the Trust at northhastingscommunitytrust@gmail.com.