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# Choose VA

CORPORAL MICHAEL J. CRESCENZ VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER VETERANS' NEWSLETTER



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**FREEDOM IS NEVER FREE**

# VEC and the Heroic Gardens Congratulations

The Veterans Empowerment Center (VEC) and the Heroic Gardens ([www.heroicgardens.org](http://www.heroicgardens.org)) was recently selected as one of the winners for the **2022 VHA National Community Partnership Challenge**. The VEC and the Heroic Gardens partnered to offer nature-based healing opportunities to Veterans with the specific goal of providing empowerment-focused opportunities to support their ongoing recovery and community integration goals.

Veterans participated in the Heroic Gardens' **Mission: Windowsill**, a three-part gardening workshop series in which they learned how to grow potted vegetables, herb gardens, and houseplants. All materials were provided free of cost. They also participated in "**Forest Bathing**," a Japanese practice also known as *shinrin-yoku*, in parks and green spaces around the city of Philadelphia. Forest Bathing is a guided, moving, meditative practice in which participants immerse themselves in nature. It is known to boost natural immunity, reduce stress, and create opportunities for connection. Both programs engage Veterans in Whole Health consistent practices, including practicing mindfulness, adding homegrown fruits, vegetables, and herbs to their diets, and connecting with, and broadening support systems and communities.

### Here are just a few comments from some of our Veteran participants

"Forest Bathing brought me back to nature and the beautiful things in life that are right there all around us if I only took the time to appreciate mother nature's beauty. It had a really calming effect on me, which I always need because I'm always at a level of high anxiety. It put me in a different place where I could be at peace with myself and not worrying. It's been really meaningful to volunteer with Heroic Gardens and help other Veterans in need. I'm thankful I can be a part of it - they do a lot of good." - **Joe DiCarlo, U.S. Army**

"The Heroic Gardens program has been very therapeutic. Since I did the gardening workshop, I look forward to waking up every morning to check on my plants and to see how they're progressing and growing. I get so excited to see them thriving with new leaves forming. It's been really meaningful to care for the plants and watch them grow from a little seed or bud. It's a real sense of accomplishment. My purple thumb is green now! Forest Bathing has been relaxing and therapeutic. It's given me tools to appreciate nature and relieve stress." - **Lisa Edwards, U.S. Army**

"Heroic Gardens has been so beneficial to me. I love gardening and planting! I find it very therapeutic and relaxing. The instructors are extremely patient and full of so much knowledge. It's something that I really look forward to being a part of. The materials are great, and nothing is left out. I hope more Veterans find out about and participate in this workshop!" - **Carmella Burnett, U.S. Army**

To learn more about the Veterans Empowerment Center, contact the program coordinator at 215-823-5800 ext. 207535.

To find out how you can get involved with our Heroic Gardens program, visit: [www.heroicgardens.org](http://www.heroicgardens.org) or email: [plantlove@heroicgardens.org](mailto:plantlove@heroicgardens.org)

