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## Veterans Find Healing and Purpose in Northeast Philly Community Garden



A once-vacant field on Megargee Street in Northeast Philadelphia is blossoming into a community garden. Heroic Gardens, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting veterans through horticulture therapy,

The acre-sized project aims to provide a space for healing, community building, and job training.

Mike Peterman, a U.S. Army veteran, credits gardening for helping him cope with PTSD.

After leaving the military in 2006, Peterman struggled to find direction until he began working at the garden.

He shared how gardening helped him slow down and rediscover purpose, filling what he c transition to civilian life.

Collie Turner, founder and executive director of Heroic Gardens, created the organization medic.

Turner believes the act of nurturing the land enables veterans to nurture themselves.

The garden began with volunteers using a no-till, "lasagna-style" method, layering compo to enrich the soil.

Spring flower bulbs have already been planted, and plans are underway to grow sunflowe

The field will open to the public by July 2024 and will support a workforce initiative emplo

The project is especially meaningful to volunteer Joe Cartin, whose family has a long histo

Cartin views his participation as a way to honor his late cousin, a veteran and firefighter v

Veterans like John Pilat, who served in the Navy, find solace in the garden's mission.

Pilat has been involved with Heroic Gardens for years, participating in their workshops an **veterans' homes**.

He sees the organization as a unique resource that combines mental health support with through gardening.

The initiative also includes plans for a "You Pick Sunflower" field, symbolizing support for

Turner envisions the field as a striking visual tribute, even from a satellite view.

But beyond aesthetics, the project's goal is to empower veterans through agriculture and for workforce development.

Nathan McWilliams of the Riverfront North Partnership believes initiatives like this are ess

And for veterans, the sense of community and responsibility cultivated in the garden prov

By turning this empty space into a flourishing garden, Heroic Gardens is planting seeds of veteran community, one flower at a time.

