

Newsday

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Gift Guide

Llife

SPRING GARDENING ISSUE

Nourishing a community

COLLABORATIVE EFFORT
TO FIGHT FOOD INSECURITY
TAKES ROOT **E4**

Marvin Makofsky with
pallets of donated supplies
in Port Washington

LINDA ROSIER

act2 | Operation Babylift marks 47th anniversary on LI **E17**

In this issue

In today's Spring Gardening Issue, meet the folks behind a community effort that aims to address food insecurity in Port Washington.

In Act 2, we share the heartfelt experiences of those who gathered on Long Island to remember the evacuation of children from the Vietnam War in 1975.

And check out today's Faith and Seniors calendars for virtual and in-person events.

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COVERSTORY

Plant a smile on

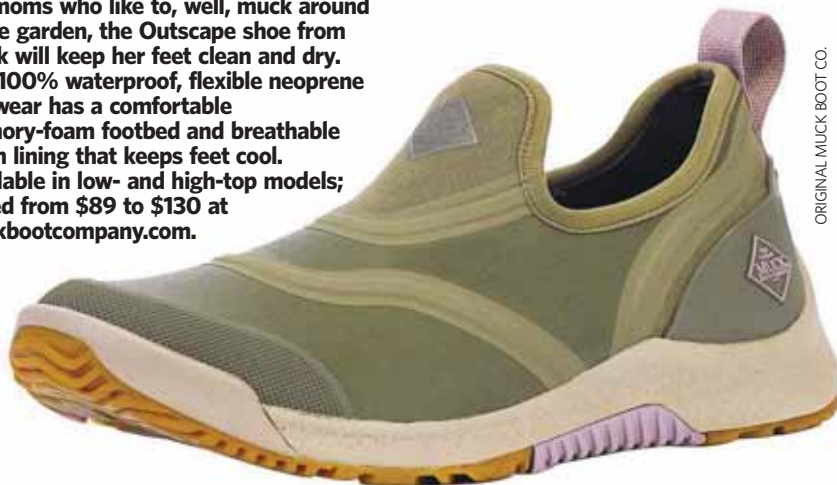
These nifty gifts can make for a thoughtful surprise on Mother's Day

BY JESSICA DAMIANO
Special to Newsday

With Mother's Day coming up on May 8, we offer a selection of thoughtful gifts for the mom in your life — or even the person who has been like a mom to you. They're perfect for those who like to garden as well as those who prefer to simply enjoy the garden.

Gardening shoes

For moms who like to, well, muck around in the garden, the Outscape shoe from Muck will keep her feet clean and dry. The 100% waterproof, flexible neoprene footwear has a comfortable memory-foam footbed and breathable mesh lining that keeps feet cool. Available in low- and high-top models; priced from \$89 to \$130 at muckbootcompany.com.



ORIGINAL MUCK BOOT CO.



RIDLEY'S GAMES

Can you dig it?

Give mom the gift of fun family time with this fast-paced, garden-themed card game. Two to four players compete to harvest fruits and vegetables from four community plots to gather ingredients for the most recipes. The player with the most-impressive feast wins the game. Suitable for ages 8 and up, \$12 at chroniclebooks.com.



JESSICA DAMIANO

Angel of the garden

Thank Mom for being your angel with this sweet, 5 1/2-inch-tall, hand-painted resin angel figurine with wire wings from Willow Tree by Susan Lordi; \$28 at willowtree.com.

her face



Pollinator heaven

Native plants provide habitat for wildlife, feed vital pollinators and are low-maintenance workhorses in the garden. Get a collection of six state-specific natives "proven to support the highest number of backyard butterflies, bees and birds" shipped to Mom's door directly from a grower in her region through Garden for Wildlife by National Wildlife Federation. Shipping is free; \$68 at gardenforwildlife.com.



Wild tomato vine candle

Every backyard vegetable grower recognizes the intoxicating scent of a homegrown tomato. Let Mom enjoy it indoors, year-round, with this hand-poured, eco-friendly soybean candle. Made with high-grade oils and a cotton wick, its biodegradable packaging is embedded with tomato seeds that can be planted into the garden; \$28 at goodeeworld.com.

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TROPICALS



**CULTURED
GERANIUMS**

Growing a solution

Community unites to create a vegetable garden in Port Washington to address food insecurity

BY JESSICA DAMIANO
Special to Newsday

Driving down Manorhaven Boulevard in Port Washington, one would never know the potential taking seed behind the hamlet's Adult Activity Center — or the promise it holds. The unassuming redbrick building obstructs a blank canvas that could very well become a life-changing endeavor, dreamed up by a “chief vegetable garden executive.”

Marvin Makofsky, 78, already responsible for organizing the donation and distribution of thousands of pounds of fresh produce in his hometown, gave himself that tongue-in-cheek moniker years ago when he began addressing hunger there.

His latest effort involves brokering a far-reaching collaboration that unites the Town of North Hempstead, The Home Depot, Scott's Miracle-Gro, local high school students and a church outreach center — all of which share a common goal: to use the property to grow food for those in need.

The initiative was born in December when Makofsky approached North Hempstead Town Council Member Mariann Dalimonte to request the use of the town-owned land.

“I loved the idea,” Dalimonte said. A meeting was arranged with the Parks & Recreation Department, and the town board passed a resolution that was approved March 10.

Tentatively named Plant A Row for the Hungry Community Garden, the property has been maintained by the parks



LINDA ROSIER

Sister Kathy Somerville, right, Our Lady of Fatima Church's outreach director, and Michelle Bazzini, in the window, help Maria de los Santos at the food pantry, which distributes produce from Plant A Row for the Hungry.



MARVIN MAKOFSKY

Members of Paul D. Schreiber High School's Honors Art Society painted pots in 2018 in which to grow produce for those in need as part of the initiative by Plant A Row for the Hungry.



MARVIN MAKOFSKY

Volunteers work at a vegetable garden at the Helen Keller National Center for DeafBlind Youths and Adults, one of the locations involved in Plant A Row for the Hungry.

department, which cuts the grass, Dalimonte said, but it is not in use.

GRASSROOTS EFFORT

For years, Makofsky, a self-employed sales executive and business-product developer, has been working tirelessly to give his food-insecure neighbors access to peppers, tomatoes, corn, beans, squash and other fresh produce to supplement the canned goods and processed foods typically available at food pantries.

The holder of 11 patents, Makofsky, who has been recognized with more than 100 national and international

design awards, has spent his career identifying and solving problems with his inventions. Hunger in his community was another problem that needed a solution, he said, and he was up for the challenge.

Makofsky sprang into action in 2010 after “hearing over and over about food deserts and underserved communities on food stamps facing \$4 tomatoes,” he said. “I knew Port Washington was a very socially and civically involved community, so I decided to take a crack at it.”

His solution? Launching the hamlet’s grassroots Plant A Row for the Hungry program,

which encourages residents to donate homegrown produce to be distributed to those in need.

The logistics were mind-boggling. Decisions had to be made about how to spread the word throughout the community, collect food, store donations, and transport and distribute them.

As he worked out the details, Makofsky partnered with the Bayles Garden Center, which lends its storage and refrigeration facilities to the cause and serves as a drop-off point where residents can bring homegrown produce. From there, the fruits, vegetables and herbs are retrieved by a team

of rotating volunteers and delivered to Our Lady of Fatima Church’s outreach center, which distributes them.

GATHERING VOLUNTEERS

In 2014, after learning about a Hartford, Connecticut, program that pays residents who are homeless to care for vegetables growing in artfully painted pots throughout the city, Makofsky was inspired to organize volunteers to grow produce in planters in downtown Port Washington. So he asked The Art Guild to paint a sample planter, which he pre-



ON THE COVER. Marvin Makofsky, founder of Plant A Row for the Hungry, perches on donated supplies that will be used to create a community garden in Port Washington.

See COVER STORY on E6

Planters serve a purpose

COVER STORY from E4

sented to business owners at a Chamber of Commerce meeting. "I got 15 orders for painted pots that night, and then people started to volunteer to paint them," he said.

Before long, Makofsky had enlisted students from Paul D. Schreiber Senior High School and the Helen Keller National Center to design and paint the 24-inch pots; then he recruited community members and organizations to sow seeds of vegetables to plant in them. Today, more than 100 painted planters sit outside downtown stores, houses of worship, libraries and community centers.

Business owners make a \$300 donation to "adopt" planters, then place them outside their doors, where signage informs passersby of the program and encourages their participation. The businesses also agree to help maintain the pots between visits from plant-care volunteers. Later in the season, produce is harvested by the volunteers and delivered to Bayles, where its employees log and store it in refrigerators along with produce donated by home gardeners.

From late spring through fall, volunteers collect the donations from the garden center and deliver them to the church. On average, each painted planter yields 10 to 20 pounds of produce, Makofsky said.

Over the years, Makofsky's mission to feed the hungry has grown to encompass: more than 40 volunteers, including master gardeners from Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County; a greenhouse operated by The Navigators, a group of individuals with special needs at The Nicholas Center; children in grades three to six who care for painted planters at Port Washington Children's Center; senior citizens groups; high school students; and in-ground gardens at Helen Keller National Center in Sands Point, the Thomas Dodge Homestead and the Children's Center.

'VERY IMPORTANT WORK'

In addition to uniting the community and building partnerships with area organiza-



MARVIN MAKOFSKY



MARVIN MAKOFSKY

Lauren Chizner and Rabbi Alysa Mendelson Graf stand with a planter they adopted outside Port Jewish Center.

Hal Linden, then manager at Ayhan's Mediterranean Marketplace, stands outside the eatery with a painted planter and signage in 2017.

Start reading

"START A COMMUNITY FOOD GARDEN: THE ESSENTIAL HANDBOOK," by LaManda Joy (Timber Press, \$24.95)

Interested in starting your own community food garden? This detailed guide, written by the founder and executive director of Peterson Garden Project, which manages seven Chicago community gardens, walks you through every step of the process, from fundraising, community organizing, site sourcing, garden design and tending the garden year-round to how to find and coordinate volunteers.

"TINY SPACE GARDENING," by Amy Pennington (Sasquatch Books, \$22.95)

If you're short on space, this guide will show you how to grow a harvest that's bountiful enough to share. Learn which plants grow best outdoors in containers or even indoors on windowsills and countertops, and the best ways to care for them. Thirty recipes are included to help you enjoy the fruits of your labor.

"THE VEGETABLE GARDENER'S BIBLE," by Edward C. Smith (Storey Publishing, \$24.95)

The second edition of this classic is every bit as relevant today as it was when it was released in 2009. The author's high-yield garden system, perfect for beginner green thumbs as well as experienced gardeners, is conveyed with a catchy acronym, WORD: Wide rows, Organic methods, Raised beds, Deep soil. In addition to specific growing advice for just about any vegetable, step-by-step photos illustrate how to maximize your harvest.

— JESSICA DAMIANO

See COVER STORY on E8

Taking on hunger together



COVER STORY from E6

tions and businesses, Makofsky, who isn't paid for his work, has hooked up irrigation systems, delivered supplies, provided growing instructions, and organized trainings, plantings and painting sessions around town. He formed a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with tax-exempt status in 2016 and received grant funding from the Port Washington Community Chest, which offers financial support to nonprofit organizations in the hamlet.

On April 29, Makofsky's latest dream was set to become a reality as employees from the Home Depot in Westbury were scheduled to volunteer their time to construct 18 raised beds donated by the store behind the Adult Activity Center, then fill them with 47,000 pounds of soil contributed by Scotts Miracle-Gro.

"Their enthusiasm is off the charts doing this," Makofsky said of the companies and their employees.

"We chose to work with Plant A Row this year because they are doing very important work providing our underprivileged communities with fresh produce during the growing season," said Danielle Squires, manager of the Westbury Home Depot. "We wanted to be able to help them increase their output, and building 18 planters at the adult center will do just that."

The project, Squires said, is part of The Home Depot Foundation's April "National Volunteer Month" program, for which its employees volunteer to work with nonprofits around the country. The program is funded through grants from the foundation, she said.

Joe Bosco, New York metro-area district manager for Scotts Miracle-Gro, said a core part of the company's mission is "Grow More Good," so "partnering with someone like Marvin, who has so much passion to provide food for people in his community who don't have money to buy it, was a no-brainer." The company is "happy to help in any way we could," he said.

More volunteers will be needed to ensure the crops in the new garden are well cared

Volunteers prepare the garden for planting at the Helen Keller National Center for DeafBlind Youths and Adults in Sands Point.



Julio Gutierrez and Bryan Girard, Bayles Garden Center employees, deliver donated produce to Our Lady of Fatima Church in Port Washington.



Sister Kathy Somerville of Our Lady of Fatima Church talks in the food pantry with Marvin Makofsky, founder of Plant A Row for the Hungry.



Marvin Makofsky works at the greenhouse behind The Nicholas Center, where Plant A Row for the Hungry is growing vegetable starter plants.

for during the growing season. “We will be interviewing residents, hopefully those who will be the recipients of the food, and we will make sure they have the tools to work with — all donated by Home Depot,” Makofsky said. “We will teach them what they need to know, although many actually already know what to do.”

“This idea of having the community grow their own food is something we have not done before,” Makofsky said,

adding that to ensure the crops meet the needs of the mostly Hispanic members of the community served by Our Lady of Fatima’s outreach center, he asked for their input. “We want to know what they would like on their plates. They should get to decide.”

Makofsky, who estimated that “a few thousand pounds of food” can be grown this summer on the 20-by-65-foot property, said, “all of it will be delivered diagonally across the

street to Our Lady of Fatima, and Sister will distribute the food.”

GENEROUS COMMUNITY

“Sister” is Sister Kathy Somerville, Order of Preachers, the Dominican nun who has been running the church’s outreach center for 40 years. The donated produce, she said, “is a much-needed addition” to the center’s offerings.

“In the beginning, we only provided canned food,” she

said. “Fresh fruits and vegetables were more of a luxury” for the 140 families who receive food through the program.

“I have never seen anyone as passionate about anything as Marvin is,” Somerville said. “You can’t say no to him because if you say no, he’s just going to come back at you,” she added with a chuckle.

Not that she ever tried, she admitted.

“I think what makes Marvin’s job easier — and my job easier — is that the Port Washington community is just so generous. We couldn’t do here what we do if it weren’t for the community,” Somerville said. “The amount he has accomplished in getting people involved is just incredible.”

Councilwoman Dalimonte concurred. “I am so honored and touched that Marvin asked me to help him with this project because he’s a wonderful person and he cares so much about the community,” she said. “Marv is what gets us all together.”

Now that the property behind the Adult Activity Center has a purpose, Dalimonte said, “my hope is that anyone who needs food will have it and that this brings more awareness that there are people all over who are hungry.”

Get involved

Each year, GardenComm (formerly Garden Writers of America), asks its members — garden writers, newspaper columnists, authors, bloggers and other influencers — to encourage their readers and followers to plant one extra row of food crops in their gardens for those in need.

“There are over 84 million households with a yard or garden in the U.S. If every gardener plants one extra row of vegetables and donates their surplus to local food agencies and soup kitchens, a significant impact can be made on reducing hunger,” the GardenComm website explains.

Since 1995, more than 20 million pounds of fresh produce, providing some 80 million meals, have been donated by home gardeners through its national Plant a Row for the Hungry campaign. “All of this has been achieved without government subsidy or bureaucratic red tape — just people helping people,” the organization states.

To participate, plant an extra row or container (or just one additional plant) and donate its harvest to your local food bank, house of worship or informally to a neighbor who could use it.

If you’d like to help even more, consider starting your own Plant a Row campaign with friends, neighbors or co-workers. If you need help getting started or finding a local drop-off site, visit gardencomm.org/PAR.

— JESSICA DAMIANO

Makofsky shares those hopes — and then some.

“I want the programs also to help the Nicholas Center Navigators, the students at the high school and at the Helen Keller Center, and all the other garden volunteers. When you do for others, you do for yourself, and then you improve your own self-esteem,” he said. “I want this to help everyone.”

“We all say it takes a village,” Dalimonte said. “And the head of our village for this is Marv.”