

Growing season



Matthias van Oosterhout and Lisa Bagwell, managers of Kula Urban Farm, pick collard greens in the North Lot in Asbury Park. TANYA BREEN/ASBURY PARK PRESS

Kula Urban Farm receives grant to expand efforts

David P. Willis Asbury Park Press
USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

ASBURY PARK - Through Kula Urban Farm, a plot with gardens of fruits, vegetables, flowers and a hydroponic greenhouse, Interfaith Neighbors is building — and feeding — a community in the middle of the city's west side.

"In the 23 or so years that I've been here at Inter-

faith Neighbors, nothing has really captured the interest of the local community as much as that farm does," said Paul L. McEvily, executive director. "As a community engagement opportunity, it has been terrific for us."

The Kula Urban Farm opened on Atkins Avenue in 2015, an oasis of green built on the site of what was a

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low-slung '60s-style boarded-up motel. The word Kula is thought to be Sanskrit and translates as "community of the heart," McEvily said.

Now Kula Farm is poised to leap forward with the help of A Community Thrives, the fundraising and grant-making initiative from the Gannett Foundation and the USA TODAY NETWORK, which includes the Asbury Park Press and APP.com.

Interfaith Neighbors is a recipient of a \$100,000 national merit grant from A Community Thrives to support Kula Farm. Along with four other Monmouth County nonprofits, the organization also received a \$5,000 grant for its overall operations.

The \$100,000 grant will help fund one of Kula Farm's major capital projects: the construction of a covered outdoor structure where the organization can hold workshops and events. Currently, those activities occur inside the greenhouse.

"The expansion of the current farm, courtesy of this award, and probably other donations, will just give us the opportunity to have a bigger impact within the community," McEvily said.

Interfaith Neighbors was one of 16 nonprofits, and the only one in New Jersey, that received national merit grants from A Community Thrives.

"Interfaith Neighborhood's Kula Urban Farms project was of interest to the committee because its purpose of expanding and improving its physical plant fits squarely in the spirit of the program," said Sue Madden, director of the Gannett Foundation.

"The multi-faceted community building project will serve a historically underserved neighborhood, enable program expansion, provide community convening space and contribute to the organization's sustainability."

While small, (it's just 200 by 50 square feet in size) Kula Farm produces about 6,000 pounds of produce a year, about a third of which is sold to Asbury Park's restaurants, such as Langosta Lounge, Cardinal Provision and Watermark. The remainder goes to food pantries in the neighborhood, including the food pantry at Bethel AME Church next door, and to individuals free of charge.

The farm also has a fully automated hydroponic greenhouse where produce, from various varieties of lettuce to endive and kale, grows 365 days a year.

Kula Farm serves Interfaith Neighbors' core mission and is a place to hold community workshops, educational classes with local school kids and farm-to-table dinners. The new structure, which will be located in the rear of the farm near an existing shed, will give those programs more space and move them out of the greenhouse, said Ste-



Lisa Bagwell, manager of Kula Urban Farm, picks vegetables at the Farm Without Borders, an extension of Kula Urban Farm located on Springwood Avenue in Asbury Park.



Matthias van Oosterhout, manager of Kula Urban Farm, picks lacinato kale as he talks about the hydroponic system at the farm in Asbury Park.

PHOTOS BY TANYA BREEN/ASBURY PARK PRESS

phanie A. Ferrier, senior development officer at Interfaith Neighbors.

"We'll be able to increase the number of community residents that we're serving with those community workshops, our youth STEM education that we do at the farm and our farm-to-table dinner series," Ferrier said. "It will also then free-up ... our growing space inside the greenhouse. It's a double win."

Other parts of the capital project, which will be funded by others, include the remodel of the shed to create a catering kitchen and add bathrooms, and installing water lines.

Interfaith Neighbors is holding a fundraiser cocktail party at 8 p.m. Oct. 15. Tickets are \$50. You'll find information on the organization's website or email info@kulafarm.org.

Four other nonprofits at the Jersey Shore each received a \$5,000 award from A Community Thrives to be used to help fulfill their overall mission. They are:

- **Ladacin Network, Ocean Township.** Ladacin provides care, including educational, therapeutic, residential, recreational and support services, to infants, children and adults with physical and developmental disabilities or delays.

- **Lunch Break, Red Bank.** Lunch Break provides food, clothing, life skills training and fellowship to those in need in the greater Monmouth County area.

- **Move For Hunger, Neptune.** Move for Hunger mobilizes the moving, relocation and multifamily housing industries to collect unopened, nonperishable food from people who are moving and delivers it to local food banks and pantries across the United States and Canada.

- **Shore House, Long Branch.** Shore House is the only community-based, non-residential, psycho-social rehabilitation and recovery day program for adults living with serious mental illness in New Jersey.