



# Sowing Seeds. Growing



**"It's very rewarding when you plant and watch (seeds) grow and then give fresh food to veterans in need."**

It's a sunshiny summer morning at the Graves-Ray-Stark VFW Auxiliary and Post 9851 in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and that means it's time for everyone, including area youth, to get to work in the garden harvesting fresh vegetables and herbs, a bounty that will feed local veterans.

"We are like a large family of volunteers helping veterans and their families," said Auxiliary 9851 President Cynthia Wright. "We feel together we can do great things for the veterans in Sumner County."

The memorial victory garden is much more than earth and plants. Project 22 members and Auxiliary, Post and Vietnam Veterans of America members who plant and pick the produce are also cultivating hope and help for veterans in need. What they collect from the garden goes to their food bank for veterans.

The garden is a joint project of the Auxiliary and Post, VVA Chapter 240 that meets at the Post and young adults (ages 16 and older) from Project 22, a social club for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Project 22, whose focus is on recreational-leisure, arts and music, independent living and encouraging vocational and social skills, is sponsored by The Arc of Cumberland Valley, a non-profit grassroots advocacy organization.

A grant secured by Project 22 financed supplies and materials for the garden. Along with some additional donations from club members and their families and a plot of land from the Post, a community garden was born three years ago.

“The young adults in Project 22 take pride in this project and have enjoyed being involved and helping to plant and care for the garden,” said Patty Daniels, Project 22 Program Coordinator and high school special education teacher. “Project 22 and The Arc have enjoyed this project immensely. This is one of many ways the young adults give back to their community; we have enjoyed working with the veterans. We have participated in the local veterans’ parade...and donated care packages to homebound veterans involved with their Post at Christmas and on Veterans Day.”



It has been a wonderful and fruitful partnership. “This was a way to keep the young adults busy during spring and summer, to work on a project, and they are so loveable that it was a pleasure to have them at the Post,” Wright said. “Everybody got on board to help. These projects together have put a spark back in our Auxiliary and Post.”

The garden has allowed Project 22 to engage with the community in doing what it values most, said William B. Scruggs, President of the Board of The Arc of Cumberland Valley.

“The victory garden has been one of the great partnerships over the last couple years that allows us to serve our local community and (it fosters) the relationships that develop,” he said. “We are always looking for creative ways to serve other groups and the victory garden has been an excellent way to do just that, serving the veterans who have served us by giving the harvest to the food bank.”

Kathy Bacon, who, along with her son, Alex, helps with the garden, said this has been such a meaningful project.

“We enjoy the relationships we have made as well as we are feeding people in need,” she said. “The veterans and Auxiliary are so kind to donate the space for us to grow the garden. Alex loves going to the Post – he really loves all the veterans. It is very rewarding when you plant and watch (seeds) grow and then give fresh food to veterans in need. We are very grateful for the opportunity to serve the community.” ✨ AC