

SUNNYVALE

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Garden Victories

Fava bean sprouts horticultural therapy program page 16

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAQUELINE BARNSTER

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Lucy Morena, right, a resident at Idylwood Care Center, helps to harvest onions from the facility's victory garden. Idylwood residents grow seasonal fruit and vegetables, which are then used in daily meals or sold at the V.A. Farmers Market in Palo Alto.



Lucy Morena, center, mixes a homemade salsa during her stint at 'Chef of the Month' at Idylwood Care Center in Sunnyvale.

Recipe for Health

Gardening program proves to be good therapy

By JOHN DUGAN

Photographs by JACQUELINE RAMSEYER

I started with a single fava bean plant. The mission-defining Horticultural Therapy Program at Sunnyvale's Idylwood Care Center kicked off because one resident

asked for fava beans in her dinner. Through gardening and food, the senior nursing home found a new form of therapy for its residents that has changed the focus and at-

titude of the entire facility at 1002 W. Fremont Ave. It began three years ago when Mrs. Catona, a resident, asked for her favorite bean to be featured in dinners, and the staff

responded by planting fava bean sprouts outside her window.

The plant soon grew nearly four feet tall, and the staff had to ask Mrs. Catona how to care for it. An

idea grew as Mrs. Catona began maintaining and harvesting the beans, then taught her own cooking

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class for three years before dying in 2009. The Idylwood staff could not ignore the effect the garden and cooking classes had on Mrs. Catona in her later days—she went from a reserved, introverted resident with little interest in getting up every morning to one of the most social members of the Idylwood community, which includes residents from throughout the South Bay.

"I thought, if a small garden with just a bean plant can do that for an individual, what can a full garden do for all the residents?" said Franco Diamond, administrator at Idylwood. "We hired a horticultural therapist and planned out an entire garden. We wanted to utilize all the green space at our disposal."

Today, the Horticultural Therapy Program includes a series of large gardens on the Idylwood campus, cooking classes and a produce stand at the farmers market at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Palo Alto where residents sell what they've grown.

The 170-bed care center is grow-

ing everything from tomatoes and cabbage to eggplant, and the residents are enjoying the health benefits of eating fresh, local vegetables on a daily basis. Diamond has nicknamed the space the "Victory Garden."

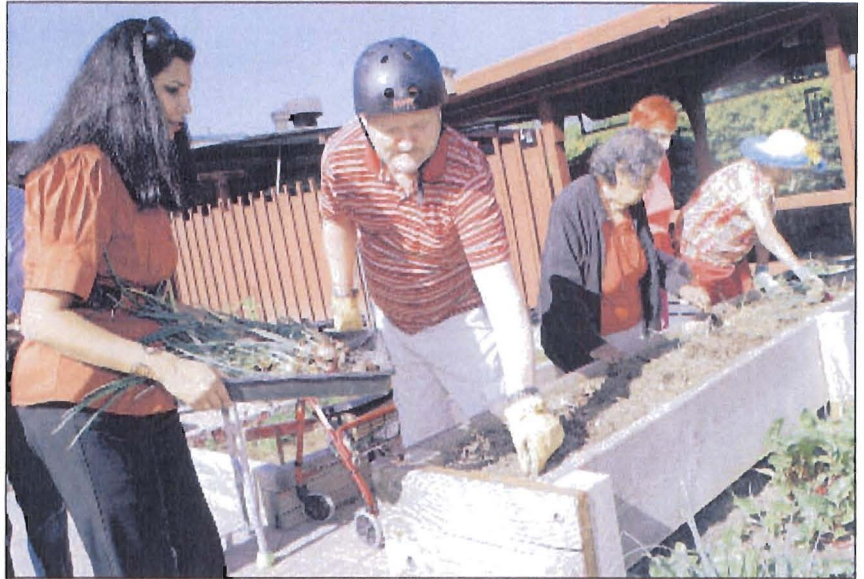
Recipe for Health

The program has energized residents and staff alike. The weight gain associated with moving into a nursing home stopped—residents were getting out in the garden, walking to their cooking classes and socializing more.

"We're seeing a higher quality of life, including lowered blood sugar, better diabetes control and bowel regularity," said Sandy Narasimhan, a dietician at Idylwood. "It's a full garden-to-table project. We started small, but we've grown a lot, and it's all about sustaining this momentum."

"This is a better place to be, now that we have the gardens and the cooking classes," Diamond said. "Sometimes these symbolic things can mean so much to our residents. Just giving them a goal, a motivation to get up every day. That's what the garden has done."

Therapists at Idylwood have seen



Clinton Britt, second from left, a resident at Idylwood Care Center, helps to harvest onions from the facility's victory garden. Idylwood residents grow seasonal fruit and vegetables, which are then used in daily meals or sold at the V.A. Farmers Market in Palo Alto.



Staff chef Martin Sanchez prepares a vegetable lentil soup with the help of residents at Idylwood Care Center in Sunnyvale. Residents take turns as 'chef of the month,' helping staff choose recipes.

a marked improvement in staff-resident interactions and overall morale since the gardening and cooking began. Food-related activities now dominate the schedule at the center, with multiple gardening groups and daily cooking classes.

"We have to find ways to motivate the residents, to get them interested in life again, and cooking gives them something to look forward to," said Rashmi Rajadhyax, an occupational therapist at Idylwood. "It's easy to motivate people with the things they've done in the past. Everyone has gardened, and everyone wants to cook."

Idylwood's sister facility in Fremont, Crestwood Manor, also features a gardening program and horticultural therapy, but the Idylwood staff hasn't heard of any other similar programs in the Bay Area. Diamond and his staff are hoping their program can be an example for facilities in the area to mimic. The program recently received wider attention after being featured in the book, *Nourish the Body and Soul*, by Action Pact Inc., a company of consultants and educators who assist nursing homes with how to become more resident-directed.

"The gardening makes me feel helpful and needed," said Marlene Clark, an Idylwood resident for the past five years. "My father had a garden when I was growing up, and

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Clinton Britt, a resident at Idylwood Care Center, shows off some of the strawberry plants he has helped to plant and care for this season. Idylwood residents grow seasonal fruit and vegetables in the facility's gardens, which are then used in daily meals or sold at the V.A. Farmers Market in Palo Alto.



Mrs. Dawood chops up carrots and onions for a vegetable lentil soup-making course given by staff chef Martin Sanchez at Idylwood Care Center in Sunnyvale.



Lucy Morena shows off a bowl of homemade salsa she made, using several ingredients from the Idylwood Victory Garden, during her stint as 'Chef of the Month' at Idylwood Care Center in Sunnyvale.

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this garden brings back a lot of good memories."

Planting the seeds

Considering the wide-ranging aspects of the Horticultural Therapy Program today, its beginnings were small. Idylwood began offering daily soup-making classes about eight years ago, but it wasn't until three years ago that Mrs. Catona's request inspired the whole shebang.

The caper to the program has been its expansion into the farmers market arena. Staff and able-bodied residents bring a load of harvested vegetables to

the Palo Alto VA every Wednesday to sell to the public. But Idylwood isn't done expanding; Diamond said there are plans to start an on-site farmers market where people from the surrounding community can come buy fruits, vegetables and prepared foods, and see the work their neighborhood nursing home is doing.

"It shows people are grateful for what we are doing," said Lucy Moreno, an Idylwood resident for three years and a member of the soup-of-the-day cooking class. "It's a daily exercise, and it gives us something really interesting to look forward to."

The soup-of-the-day class rotates "head chef" status among residents on a weekly basis. Each chef gets to choose

what recipes will be prepared and what sides will be served, and recently Moreno upped the ante. In addition to one of her popular Mexican soups, Moreno made homemade salsa, guacamole and fresh tortilla chips. She said the staff may have eaten more of the meal than the residents.

The staff at Idylwood has made significant changes to the culture at the

center in recent years, and Diamond in particular has overseen a wide range of upgrades since he became administrator in 1999. He's most proud of the top-to-bottom change that has come from the horticultural therapy program.

"As a nursing home, we're limited to the brick-and-mortar structures in terms of the physical changes we can make," Diamond said, "but there's

no limit to the feelings we can foster in the residents. This garden and these cooking classes, they've made more of a difference than I ever could have imagined."

For more information about Idylwood and the horticultural therapy program, visit www.crestwoodbehavioralhealth.com/sunnyvale.