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## Stonybrook garden is growing in Kinnelon

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2012 LAST UPDATED: MONDAY JANUARY 16, 2012, 7:41 AM

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Thanks to the deeply-rooted commitment of the school district, borough, and community, a garden has sprouted at Stonybrook School and is growing.

Borough Environmental Commission (BEC) Vice Chairperson Carol Vreeland, who also sits on the [Kinnelon Sustainable New Jersey Advisory Committee](#), which is an offshoot of the BEC, with Nina Mickey and Councilman Gary Moleta, is excited about how the interest and enthusiasm in the Stonybrook School Garden has grown.



Funds raised will go toward the Stonybrook School Garden's expansion where students can learn about just how food is grown for their consumption.

According to Vreeland, the Stonybrook School Garden has existed for roughly three years. Vreeland said she contacted Mark Mongon, principal of Stonybrook School, and fourth-grade teacher Mary Kay Catalano, who has been maintaining the garden with her fourth-grade students. Vreeland asked that the [Kinnelon Sustainable Jersey Advisory Committee](#) partner with the school to expand the garden and they were receptive to her request.

Vreeland shared the plans for the garden expansion with the [Kinnelon Open Space Advisory Committee](#), which is another committee Vreeland serves on in the borough. Amanda Hagl, a Kinnelon High School senior, who is also a member of the Kinnelon Open Space Advisory Committee, expressed interest in the project. Hagl took the bull by the horns and organized fund-raisers for seed money for the garden expansion. Hagl ran a bake sale and asked Applebee's to sponsor a dining event where 10 percent of the proceeds went to the garden project.

"Sometimes you say things and you wonder if people are listening. This time, I'm glad someone was listening. Amanda's contribution to the garden has been terrific," said Vreeland. "This has been a great learning experience for the students. A number of seeds did not do well because it was very rainy. The

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basil was exceptional."

According to the Sustainable New Jersey website, Sustainable Jersey is a certification program for New Jersey's municipalities that are making the effort to "go green," save money, and take steps to sustain the quality of life over the long term. Kinnelon is in the process of becoming certified. The borough's participation in the garden will earn it points toward its Sustainable Jersey certification.

Sustainable Jersey identifies concrete actions that municipalities can implement to become "certified" and be considered leaders on the path to a sustainable community. Sustainable Jersey provides guidance and tools to enable communities to make progress on each action, provides access to grants, and identifies opportunities for municipalities to make progress toward the actions.

Catalano said there had been a garden in the courtyard at Stonybrook School a number of years ago, but it fell to the wayside and left weeds behind. Catalano said she and her students weeded the area with the help of the school's environmental club. Girl Scouts and Boys Scouts also helped out. Additionally, she has received help from parent volunteers and her dad, Donald Woodruff, who is somewhat of an expert gardener.

Initially just flowers were planted. Catalano received a mini grant from the Kinnelon Elementary Home & School Association to start the garden. Each year, through these mini grants, she has been able to buy plants, mulch, and tools. Then tomatoes, eggplant, and basil were added. Last year, peppers were introduced to the garden for the first time. The fruits of the students' labor were given to the cafeteria personnel, who whipped up a salad. Some students also took home some of the vegetables.

Catalano said she has applied to Whole Foods for a grant, which would allow for further expansion of the garden. She expects to hear next month whether the \$2,000 grant was approved. In the future, Catalano would like to see the center area of the courtyard, which is covered by stones, transformed into a garden area complete with vegetables and a fruit tree. There is also talk of a garden being planted at Kiel School. The hope is that the garden at Stonybrook becomes so fruitful, that vegetables can be donated to the Kinnelon Food Pantry, she said.

"The kids are proud of the garden especially because it was a neglected area. They love being outside and I get them to really work hard doing weeding and planting. They like seeing the things that they have planted grow," said Catalano.

"Growing food in the garden also encourages healthy eating. The kids are much more apt to try vegetables and fruits if they grow them. One student even took home some basil and found a recipe that needed basil," she said.

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