

Wednesday: Gardens are Thrifty

Philadelphia Profile in Thrift: [The Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center](#) (CBCC) and [Greensgrow Farm](#)

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—**Sister Karen Owens, SSJ, Director of CBCC**

Thrift Tip of the Day: [Find](#) a community garden near you, or to [learn](#) how to start one.

Fast Facts

- In 1997, the land that Greensgrow Farm now occupies was a vacant & contaminated brownfield on the site of a former galvanizing plant. Today, Greensgrow has a nursery, a farm market, traditional and low-income CSAs [Community Supported Agriculture], and a shared, community kitchen.
- In 2000, the land that the Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center now occupies was an abandoned ballroom. Today, its multi-purpose community center includes a greenhouse and community garden.
- Philadelphia has more than 400 community gardens.

The New Thrift Grows Why Gardens are Thrifty

In the early twentieth century, thrift advocates proposed the community garden as "a sort of outdoor laboratory" and as a place to teach students "thrift and responsibility, gentleness, and a love for the beautiful and for growing things." Like these early thrift advocates, CBCC and Greensgrow understand that gardening has a broad educational purpose. Both organizations are committed to growing not only food and flowers in their gardens and greenhouses, but to growing the neighborhood of Kensington.

Learn More about CBCC and Greensgrow
An interview with Sister Karen Owens, SSJ, Director of CBCC; Samantha Bute, Director of the CBCC Out-of-School Time Program; and Noelle Dames, Coordinator of the Greensgrow LIFE [Local Initiative for Food Education] program

Tell us a little bit more about your school garden and greenhouse.

KO: "It is more of an educational garden than a community garden. The Visitation students use it, but they've also had people from other organizations come and use it so that kids can learn planting and growing and harvesting their own foods. This past spring kids were picking cherry tomatoes off the vine and eating them. Most Kensington children aren't going to have experienced that. The kids also get excited because they do composting and they love to see what it looks like inside a composter. We're really trying to teach them a full capacity of environmental projects through the garden."

Is there a community garden, as well?

KO: "We also have a little community garden across the street that people just come and plant, and it's all neighbors planting. They assumed abandoned land and cultivated it. So we have two gardens with two very different purposes."

CBCC and Greensgrow recently partnered on a youth project called "[Restaurant Wars](#)." Tell us more about that.

SB: "Greensgrow has a community kitchen. One of the things they wanted to do was partner with a group that was youth based and that they could teach cooking to. So we connected. In our youth afterschool program, we do what's called project based learning. It's a tricky way of helping students further their education without knowing that they're being taught anything. So for "Restaurant Wars" every student has a different role: some are learning marketing, some are learning how to write and critique, some are learning how to cook, just different tasks. There are two competing teams that will be having a cooking competition with the help of Greensgrow chef Chris Koch."

How do you think the students have benefited from the partnership?

SB: "Over the classes that they've done they've used stuff from the garden. It's been good because the kids have been exposed to food they wouldn't have been otherwise. One of the soups they loved was cream of cauliflower—no one would have guessed that! They also like butternut squash. It was kind of refreshing to see that they were willing to step outside of their comfort zones and try something different."

Tell us more about the LIFE program at Greensgrow.

ND: "The program allows people to stretch their SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] benefits to get fresh, affordable food, and to get free cooking and nutrition classes. The educational component is key, when folks are faced with fresh vs. convenience foods, unsure how to store or prepare it, and whether or not their families will eat it. It was a challenge to reach capacity, and we tried to eliminate as many barriers as possible, reminding participants each week by phone, offering flexible payments, offering child care during classes, and expanding the geographic area throughout the city. By the end of the season, it spread through word of mouth, and we had participants coming on two buses to get here."

You mentioned that you grew up in Kensington when Greensgrow Farms was still a vacant lot and an abandoned building. What was Kensington like then?

ND: "I grew up around the corner from Greensgrow, as industry and people were leaving. As with many parts of the city, there wasn't a lot of civic pride. Kensington was, and sometimes still is better known for its negative aspects. But there have always been good folks at the heart of the neighborhood, keeping it together. They've maintained it at a certain level that has allowed many of the positive changes going on now to take off and flourish. Pockets are once again a neighborhood of choice for long-timers and newcomers."

Information courtesy of www.newthrift.org