This photo is one of my favorites taken in recent years at Grassroots Gardens. The lot that was to become the Broadway Community Garden was still vacant. We were awaiting our 25th-anniversary Earth Day celebration to open our new Community Garden Resource Center to all in the spring. But first we wanted to show 389 Broadway to our community gardeners and celebrate Harvest. So we joined together in late September 2019 to do just that. The last of the revelers are pictured here, at dusk. Little did we know, it would be the last occasion we would gather as a community for some time. All of our plans to celebrate 25 years as a nonprofit fell by the wayside, as did the world’s plans, once the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020.
As I write this retrospective in early 2021, I am grateful for our gardeners’ health, and our community’s perseverance. When faced with the most pressing public health crisis of our time, our community gardeners did what they do best: They took care of one another and made sure no one went hungry. 2020 was not the 25th-anniversary year we had planned, but we lived our mission: growing healthy food, healing systemic harm, and strengthening neighborhoods through community gardens. In an unprecedented year, we turned hunger into hope. We planted seeds for liberation and resilience. We gardened communities. This is who we are. Here’s to a better year and another 25 years growing Buffalo-Niagara!

GGWNY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jeanette Koncikowski
COVID-19: GARDENING TOGETHER THROUGH A PANDEMIC

The lockdown to protect the public from the COVID-19 pandemic began right near the start of gardening season. As the world went home, people turned to their gardens for solace and for food. We knew that our community gardens were already essential to supporting food security in our cities, so when we were deemed an essential agricultural service, we doubled down on our efforts to ensure that anyone who needed access to food could grow it with us.

We called on our partners at the University at Buffalo Food Systems and Healthy Communities Lab as well as the Cornell Cooperative Extension in Erie County to help us determine how to keep the gardens open safely. Together we developed guidelines for safe growing and community connection. Thanks to the dedication of our community gardeners and staff, 87 of a planned 110 gardens were able to remain open throughout the 2020 season, as well as every one of our neighborhood gardens. And, thanks to the dedication of Greg Wilder, our school garden coordinator, and committed parent volunteers, 1/3 of our school gardens that were accessible to the public were able to remain open.

Plans to build our first universally designed community garden at the Broadway Community Garden, adjacent to our headquarters, were postponed so that we could focus on building as many beds as possible to distribute vegetables to our neighbors in the 14204 zip code. Support from the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo allowed us to build more raised beds than ever before, and we worked with FeedMore WNY to ensure our gardeners knew where they could donate their surplus harvest.

“We were able to feed the community... to locate food pantries and food giveaways. We gave out masks. We found the essential workers in the community and got extra masks to them.”

MICHELLE AT MAYER AVE COMMUNITY GARDEN

Lead gardener Channing Hill at the Broadway Community Garden

FeedMore WNY and Grassroots Gardens partnered to ensure as much extra food as possible could be grown and donated this year

Fresh, organic food grown at Bennett Park Montessori’s School Garden was given away to school families at supply pickups throughout the year
FEEDMORE WNY'S COMMUNITY GARDEN

Never has FeedMore WNY been more essential to supporting our communities. The community garden in memory of our mutual founder, J. Milton “Zeke” Zeckhauser, is located at FeedMore WNY’s Holt Street property. Nutritionist and garden leader Marla Ryan shared that the garden is a space for community members to learn to grow their own produce through garden and nutrition workshops, education, and hands-on experience: “The space provides fresh, locally grown produce to our community members, partner agencies, and FeedMore WNY’s clients. In 2020, FeedMore WNY distributed enough food through all of their feeding programs to provide nearly 16 million meals to neighbors in need – approximately 4 million more meals than in 2019.”

In response to the pandemic, FeedMore WNY’s community garden focused on increasing community members’ access and intake of fresh fruits and vegetables by growing and distributing produce to FeedMore WNY’s food pantries. Ryan adds, “A new, free, community-shared agriculture (CSA) program was also established to distribute prepacked bags of garden produce to community members. In total, more than 1,000 pounds of produce were harvested and distributed to the community.” Incredible!

Thank you to the staff and volunteers of FeedMore WNY for their efforts to ensure food access to all in need.
The Freedom Gardens initiative, founded by long-time Grassroots Gardener Ms. Gail Wells (pictured above, left) is designed to inspire resilience and independence for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) living in Buffalo who were impacted most by coronavirus.

In May and June 2020, Freedom Gardens received support from the WNY COVID Relief Fund, via Open Buffalo and Seeding Resilience, to launch their effort to provide 50 households with backyard or front-yard raised-bed or container gardens. An astounding 384 people applied in just six days, a testament to the immense need within our city. Elders and families with children under 5 were prioritized and invited to join the movement to grow their own food for liberation and resilience, at no cost.

Using a curriculum created by Soul Fire Farms of Troy, NY, Freedom Gardens lifted the gardening and farming expertise of Black growers, provided resources for self-care during COVID-19, and distributed personal protective equipment.

Buffalo Freedom Gardens is supported by Food for the Spirit, the Buffalo Food Equity Network, the CopperTown Block Club, Access To A-Free-Ka, the Juneteenth Agricultural Pavilion Committee, and the Juneteenth Festival of Buffalo. Grassroots Gardens of WNY is proud to support this effort by acting as a fiscal agent, providing co-education, and hosting supplies at our Community Garden Resource Center. A special thank-you to CJ Krantz, our soil vendor, for their support in this community-led initiative.

To support Freedom Gardens or inquire about plans for the 2021 season, email yourfreedomgarden@gmail.com.
WEATHERING THE PANDEMIC FINANCIALLY

Thanks to donors like you and our philanthropic partners, we weathered a difficult year as government contributions were affected by COVID-19. We remain grateful that we are again in a position to support material investment in all of our current gardens in 2021*.

**Total income: $384,280**

- Foundation and nonprofit grants: 65%
- Government grants: 17%
- Direct public support: 13%
- Investments: 5%

**Total expenses: $361,512**

- Garden operations: 69%
- Administration: 19%
- Public education: 10%
- Fundraising: 2%

*These figures represent end-of-year draft financials. At press time, GGWNY is undergoing its annual independent review, through May 2021. Visit our NYS Charities profile to view financial statements for previous years.
2020 CULTIVATORS

Special thanks to the following philanthropic and organizational partners who helped us grow our most impactful season yet!

Baird Foundation

[CITY OF BUFFALO]

HARRY CHAPIN FOUNDATION

CITY OF BUFFALO

LOVE YOUR BLOCK

C.J. KRANTZ ORGANICS

TOPSOIL - MULCH - COMPOST - STONE

Community Foundation

for Greater Buffalo

Councilmember David Rivera

WNY Children's Environmental Health Center

Baird Foundation

Councilmember Mitch Nowakowski

FIRST NIAGARA FOUNDATION

Health Foundation

for Western & Central New York

DEAF ACCESS SERVICES
an affiliate of People Inc.

FREEDOM GARDENS

M&T BAnk

Land Trust Alliance

Together, conserving the places you love

Lockport City School District

Pride in our Past, Faith in our Future

Niagara Falls City School District

Learning for All, Whoever it Takes

JRO

JOHN R. OISHEI FOUNDATION

MAP Growing Green

NYS P2I

PARTNERSHIP FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

Open Buffalo

Simple Gifts Fund

United Way

Urban Roots

WE ACT

Western New York

Independent Living, Inc.

Family of Agencies

WILSON SUPPORT CENTER

Affiliated Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo

WNY Children's Environmental Health Center

Western New York Foundation

Western New York COVID-19 Community Response Fund
THE LOTUS PAD: HOMESPACE'S HEALING GARDEN

Homespace Corporation joined the Grassroots Gardens network after they installed a garden to support their supervised independent living program for youth in foster care who are expecting or have small children. Homespace’s garden, dubbed the Lotus Pad, is a pilot site for our therapeutic community garden programming, which partners with residential facilities to bring community gardens on-site. Thanks to the generous contributions of a philanthropic funder, the Lotus Pad is one of three sites that will receive a garden build-out, along with training on therapeutic gardening and general garden care.

The Lotus Pad provides a serene space for young mothers who need support and play opportunities for their children. Plans include a screened-in gazebo for group meetings and classes; a sensory garden space; fairy and gnome gardens for play; ample pollinator plants to attract butterflies and hummingbirds; an herbal tea garden; strawberry, herb, and tomato planters for the youth’s town-home patios; and a drip irrigation system.

Despite a slow start due to the lockdown, we were able to plant and harvest a full crop of vegetables in the fall. And our partnership continues to grow: We hope to provide on-site assistance with our Community Garden Trainer and our Therapeutic Gardening Coordinator in spring 2021.
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS AS A NONPROFIT

1995-2020

We had big plans for our 25th-anniversary celebration, until COVID-19 crashed the party. While we had to cancel three out of four planned events, we were grateful to gather virtually for our annual pie raffle in November. We used the opportunity to recognize the people behind Grassroots Gardens who have made the organization a success. Without their dedication, our region’s community gardens would not flourish the way they do!

CHANNING HILL
Rookie of the Year Award
Broadway Community Garden

MARISSA MORRIS
Student Gardener of the Year Award
Pelion Community Garden

YANN SPINDLER
Ambassador Award, Buffalo Mulberry Community Garden

TOM LOWE

GERLDINE WILSON
Ambassador Award, Niagara Falls
Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan

Ambassador Award, Victoria Avenue Community Garden
RECOGNIZING THE CHANGE-MAKERS

During the November event, we recognized our organization’s change-makers: the people who live our values and have impacted so many with their life’s work. We recognized Dr. Samina Raja, of the University at Buffalo Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, with our Champion for Change award, for her work to better our regional, national, and international food systems.

We honored Ms. Nettie Anderson, 92, with our Lifetime Achievement Award for her contributions to the Girard Place neighborhood, home to her beloved ornamental garden, and her work as a mentor to so many. Nettie and her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren gathered as a tree was planted in her honor and a plaque placed in the garden, recognizing her service to the community. We were deeply saddened to learn of Ms. Nettie’s passing in early 2021. She will always be remembered with profound love, gratitude, and admiration.

We also remembered Milton Zeckhauser, founder of Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo, and have installed a memorial plaque, along with one of his garden shovels, at our new Community Garden Resource Center.
WE GARDEN COMMUNITIES

Our staff and team went above and beyond in 2020, working remotely or often alone in the gardens to ensure that our community food needs were met. They kept our task forces on track and reached out to the community when it was most needed. Special thanks to:

Graceanne Brown Garden Operations and Outreach Assistant
Nicole Capozziello Therapeutic Garden Coordinator (Early 2020)
Tim Chen Program Manager
Casie Keegan Therapeutic Garden Coordinator (Late 2020)
Jeanette Koncikowski Executive Director
Emere Nieves Community Garden Trainer
Maggie Rapp Americorps VISTA and Niagara Falls Coordinator
Gail Wells Project Consultant and founder of Buffalo Freedom Gardens
Gerldine Wilson Gardening for All Coordinator
Greg Wilder Garden Education Coordinator

Thanks also to our 2020 Board of Directors: Raana Azam, Ellen Barnum (Chair), Jessica Braunscheidel, James Ciliberto, Natalie Cook, Bob Doyle (Vice Chair), Gail Graham (Emeritus), Denis Guerin, Diane Kozlowski, Ranisha Litten, Kevin Meindl, Daun Nicholas, Minesh Patel (Secretary), Kristin Re (Treasurer), Daniel Roma, and Baris Vahapoglu. These extraordinary volunteers gave so much of their time and effort this year to keep us growing strong.

389 Broadway St.
Buffalo, NY 14204

www.grassrootsgardens.org
716-783-9653