New Digs, New Name

Newly transplanted as Capital Roots

Hundreds of community members attended the grand opening of The Urban Grow Center on December 3, and yet it was completely silent as the crowd eagerly watched two volunteers unfurl a banner that hung from the side of the facility’s water-reuse silo.

“We have a very special announcement to make,” Executive Director Amy Klein had said moments prior. Applause erupted when the banner fully displayed our new logo and Klein announced that Capital District Community Gardens is now Capital Roots! For forty years we have been known for what has become just one of our 11 programs. We are very much looking forward to operating under a name that truly encompasses all the work we do to reduce the impact of poor nutrition on public health.

Timing is everything! Our new name coincides with the grand opening of our new headquarters and regional food hub, which will enable us to triple the amount of produce we are distributing throughout the Capital Region.

Capital Roots’ staff moved into The Urban Grow Center a week before Thanksgiving - which gave us just enough time to make it feel like home before we opened the building to visitors. Community members toured the facility while enjoying culinary samples prepared by the Chef’s Consortium and live music provided by Chuck Fuller and Neil Brown. We could not be more pleased that it seems everyone else felt right at home too!

Volunteers have made their mark on our new volunteer center (sponsored by First Niagara Bank) - having a space dedicated just for them has enabled them to assist with our annual appeal mailing in record time. Visitors to the building and residents of the surrounding neighborhood are buying fresh fruits and veggies from our onsite produce market (sponsored by MVP Health Care.) Our gardener resource room (sponsored by SEFCU) makes seeds and a collection of gardening texts available for our community gardeners and our Educator is busy planning gardening classes to host in the space. Our staff are so glad to now be loading produce onto their vehicles under a covered roof in our produce distribution center.

We are very proud to have rehabbed The Urban Grow Center using sustainable building technologies. We hope others will be inspired to replicate our use of solar panels, a living roof, permeable paving and water-reuse systems. The Center is also fully accessible and Capital Roots looks forward to welcoming volunteers with all abilities and involving them in the work we do.

Capital Roots has raised 80 percent of the $2.8 million needed to complete the first phase of development at The Urban Grow Center. You can help complete this effort and be a part of this special project! Mail a tax deductible check (make a note that it is for the Grow Center) to Capital Roots, 594 River Street, Troy, NY 12180 or make a donation online at capitalroots.org. And please, come visit!
We grow, educate and provide.

From the opening of its first gardens in 1975, to the dynamic and multifaceted organization of today, Capital Roots has worked to reduce the impact of poor nutrition on public health in the Capital Region. We organize community gardens, improve access to healthy food, offer nutrition and horticulture education for all ages and coordinate urban greening programs in Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady and southeastern Saratoga counties.

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Less than one year ago we stood inside the gutted shell of our newly purchased building to tell the community about our dream for the Urban Grow Center. We were joined by the mayors of our three major cities who came together to show their support for this unique project; a place where people can experience the power of local food and see it harnessed for the social, economic and physical benefit of the entire region. We were joined by friends in the business community who pledged their support to make this Center a success.

And eight months later, we’ve done it!

This project has been a leap of faith for some and a commitment of deep devotion for others. Funding for the Urban Grow Center was and is an effort of many. We couldn’t have raised $2.2 million (so far) without the substantial support provided by our friends at SEFCU, MVP Health Care, The McCarthy Charities, First Niagara Bank or from the Massry/Knox and Jones families. We are deeply grateful for their support. This campaign, however, has truly been about everyone giving what they can, and it has been supporters with contributions big and small who believed in our dream that have helped to make it all possible. This is most definitely a community effort.

We are blessed by the diversity of our community – our gardeners, volunteers, farmers, and community partners- all who weave together the fabric and joy of our work. The unique nature of the Urban Grow Center was a labor of love for many who helped take an old manufacturing building and make it a functional and beautiful space.

In January, we will be celebrating 40 years since Dean Leith, Bob Schwartz and a few other Garden Way guys got together and started a small nonprofit organization called Capital District Community Gardens. After four decades, I’m proud to say that the seeds they planted have grown quite well, and we are now an organization working on many fronts to help more than 175,000 people in four counties access fresh healthy food.

As we opened the doors on the Urban Grow Center, we decided it was the right time to mark another new stage in our history with a new name that better told the story of our work to Grow, Educate and Provide. We hope that you are proud of your role in the last 40 years of the organization’s history, and we look forward to your support as Capital Roots continues to grow.
When Capital Roots was incorporated in 1975, the organization managed a handful of community gardens in Troy. The first permanent garden site at 11th & Eagle Streets in Troy was purchased in 1980, and in 1981, Capital Roots established a Permanent Site Fund to provide dedicated funds for the purchase of land for new gardens. Now decades later, the Community Garden Program offers plots in 49 gardens located throughout Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady and southern Saratoga Counties where almost 4,000 people grow their own healthy, organic food.

Capital Roots’ Community Garden Program has strived to ensure permanent protection of garden sites through land acquisition. Local municipalities and individuals have donated properties, and Capital Roots has purchased vacant lots suitable for gardens. We currently own 25 of our gardens and an additional eight are located on parkland. We continue to seek property for new gardens throughout the Capital Region. Please contact us for more information about the Community Garden Program.

Two years ago, with prodding from her mother, Dashinka, Cherle Williams quit her job at McDonalds. Trading a paycheck for a modest stipend and a share of fresh food Cherle joined Capital Roots’ Produce Project. Dashinka had encouraged her daughter’s efforts to save money for college, but thought the system of training and youth development at the Produce Project urban farm offered much more than a job in fast food ever could.

“Cherle saw what she was learning right away on the farm,” Dashinka said. “You plant a seed and it grows into food! I loved when she would bring home food and say, ‘I grew this!’ Then we would prepare it together. It’s important to teach our kids these lessons because it sticks with them.”

Today Cherle is a college freshman majoring in Pre-Law at the University of New York at Albany. She and her mother credit the connections and experience she gained at the Produce Project for her success. We credit Cherle, who rose to every occasion and inspired her peers as a student leader to work hard and invest in their futures. She is missed.
The Healthy Places Department, which includes The Veggie Mobile® and Veggie Mobile® Sprout produce markets (sponsored by CDPHP), Healthy Stores (sponsored by MVP Health Care), Veggie Rx, and The Virtual Veggie Mobile® programs, is happy to be in our new home at The Urban Grow Center. Our team has been working hard to organize our new space to maximize our Food Hub productivity.

The Urban Grow Center’s distribution area is not only five times larger than our previous space, but it also allows us to expand nearly every facet of our operation, from purchasing to delivery. In particular, the Food Hub is able to accommodate larger groups of volunteers who are able to work on multiple projects simultaneously. We also have a loading dock and storage space that enables us to efficiently move products from local farms and vendors into the loading and storage area for redistribution. The layout of the building allows us to expand service to our customers while ensuring our produce is as fresh and delicious as possible by minimizing the time products spend outside of refrigeration.

Our Virtual Veggie Mobile® online marketplace is also expanding service, and our team is handling more orders than our previous facility would allow. We have also continued to diversify the products we offer to our customers - farm-fresh eggs, cheese, yogurt, meat and more. We look forward to expanding our sales to individual customers through partnerships with agencies in Schenectady and Albany, similar to those we have formed with the Commission on Economic Opportunity in Troy.

Please feel free to come and visit us in our new home where you can volunteer with one of our innovative programs or in our new distribution area. Whether you are a regular volunteer, or have not yet had the chance to work with us, we are confident your time spent in our new facility will be enjoyable!
Capital Roots’ Squash Hunger Program has experienced rapid growth over the past two years despite our cramped and inefficient work space. Strong partnerships with Honest Weight Food Co-Op, produce growers and distributors at the Menands Regional Market, and a number of CSA Farms and local farmers markets have tipped the scales way up, allowing Capital Roots to double the pounds of produce rescued and distributed to community food programs from 22,000 pounds in 2012 to more than 55,000 pounds in 2014.

Our new Grow Center provides ample space to more effectively store and move large quantities of produce, greatly improving the efficiency of our mobile markets, Virtual Veggie Mobile, Healthy Stores and Squash Hunger Program. A covered loading dock with a pallet jack and expanded refrigerator and freezer space will give our staff the proper resources and space to greatly increase Capital Roots’ food distribution efforts. We’re shooting for six figure poundage for our Squash Hunger program in 2015!

Capital Roots launched the Taste Good Series in 2005 as a way to introduce small children (Pre K through 2nd grade) to a variety of fresh fruits and veggies in a classroom setting. As the Taste Good Series has evolved over the years, Capital Roots’ Educator has worked hard to connect the children’s families to our other healthy food access programs, providing opportunities for affordable fresh produce options in the home. The students are sent home with recipes and information about our Community Gardens program and coupons to shop on our Veggie Mobile® produce market.

These efforts are paying off as we see more and more “Taste Good” families signing up for garden plots, shopping on our mobile markets and in our healthy stores. Just recently, a young girl and her Mom stopped at our Produce Project booth at the Delmar Farmers Market. She had participated in The Taste Good Series at Mercy Cares For Kids and insisted that her Mom come and buy veggies from our Produce Project students.

A first grader at Abram Lansing Elementary School in Cohoes tries a bell pepper during a Taste Good Series session. After giving it a try he said, “it tastes good! And it’s good for my heart too!”
The journey from Capital Roots’ headquarters was located at 40 River Street, Troy from 2004 to 2014. We are forever grateful for Callanan Industries Inc. for donating this space to Capital Roots. We outgrew the 3,000-square-foot property as we continued to launch new programs.

Along with board members and capital campaign committee members, Capital Roots’ Executive Director cuts the grapevine “ribbon” to officially open The Urban Grow Center.

Capital Roots purchased the 165-year-old property and an acre of city land at 594 River Street in July of 2013 to create The Urban Grow Center - the site of our new headquarters and 12,000-square-foot food hub.

The second floor of The Urban Grow Center after the building had been gutted and before construction began. We are very thankful for the volunteers who helped us remove scrap metal from the building.

The Greco Construction team lays the steel for The Urban Grow Center’s new produce distribution center. A Green Innovation Grant from the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation helped fund the sustainable building technologies that were used when rehabbing the center.

Capital Roots officially launched The Urban Grow Center capital campaign at a press conference in February, 2014. Here Produce Project students fill a giant thermometer with fresh produce to represent the money raised.

Along with board members and capital campaign committee members, Capital Roots’ Executive Director cuts the grapevine “ribbon” to officially open The Urban Grow Center.
Staff check out their offices at The Urban Grow Center for the first time. There is an intern station on the second floor, so that college students have a designated space for developing their skills while helping Capital Roots.

In The Urban Grow Center’s produce distribution center, a staff member uses one of the loading bays to transfer produce from cold storage to The Veggie Mobile produce market.

Staff bag produce for The Veggie Mobile produce market in The Urban Grow Center’s produce distribution center (sponsored by McCarthy Charities.) The 12,000 square-foot food hub has loading bays, pallet jacks and 500 square-feet of cold storage space.

The Urban Grow Center’s gardener resource room (sponsored by SEFCU) makes seeds and a collection of gardening texts available to our community gardeners. This space enables Capital Roots’ Educator to double the number of gardening classes she offers to the community each year.

A staff member bags fresh vegetables for a customer at The Urban Grow Center’s onsite produce market (sponsored by MVP Health Care.) The market makes fresh produce available for visitors to the building and residents of the surrounding neighborhood Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm.

In The Urban Grow Center’s volunteer center (sponsored by First Niagara Bank) a volunteer helps Capital Roots with a mailing. With the facility’s handicap accessible features and this space dedicated for volunteers, Capital Roots is now able to fully include everyone in our work.
Back in the late 1980’s, CDCG started working with the City of Troy to plan and implement urban forestry projects to improve air quality, absorb noise, reduce storm water runoff, moderate temperature and beautify urban neighborhoods. A Street Tree Advisory Committee was formed and a Street Tree Master Plan was written for the City. In 1995, CDCG began using large bare root trees for plantings. They are light weight and easy to transport and plant, particularly in crowded urban sidewalk settings. Bare root trees are also less costly, allowing for more trees to be planted.

Over the next 15+ years, CDCG planted more than 2,000 trees in Troy, Cohoes, Rensselaer, and other area cities. Each tree planting utilizes a large corps of volunteers including local high school students who provide the labor needed to get the trees in the ground. CDCG also works with local municipalities and businesses to install low maintenance landscaping in public spaces. In 2013, the City of Troy re-formed the Tree Advisory Committee and recently received a Community Forestry grant from NYS DEC to provide funding for two tree plantings over the next 2 years.

Capital Roots raised $73,000 (up 38 percent from last year) at our 8th Annual ‘Autumn Evening in the Garden’ gala, which was held at the Hilton Garden Inn - Troy on September 11. Dollars raised at the event will support our programs.

We enjoyed hosting 350 guests, for which 16 of our region’s top chefs prepared culinary samples using fresh meat, cheese and produce donated by nearly 40 local farms.
Donations Received May 6 - September 15, 2014

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Pryba, Tobin & Company CPAs, PC
Rensselaer County Chamber of Commerce
Sage Brothers Company
Sage Computers
SEFCU
ShopRite Supermarkets
Smith and Jones
Stewart’s Shops
Students for Peace and Survival
Ten Thousand Villages
The Neary Group
The Niles & Carl Group
Times Union Hope Fund
Trampoline Design
Trumansburg Hardware
Troy Savings Bank Foundation
United Group of Companies
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Debbie LaMontagne
Joseph A. La Spisa
Mary Ann Mahoney
Orange Motors
Out of the Ordinary
Hannelore Passonno
Doug and Mary Pratt
Ray Schultz Farm & Greenhouse
Karina Savio & Peace Tree Organics
Terri & Robert Sutton
Barbara Todd
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by Spiral Design Studio
Peggy Emery
by Van Rensselaer Garden Club
Randi Lewis
by Van Rensselaer Garden Club
Alexandra Parry
by WholeFoods Market
Tributes in honor of:
Charlie and Cheryl Barnes
by Drs. Michael and Cheryl DeVito
Bunny Bitten, for Mother’s Day
by Lizabeth Bitten and Gregg W. Brown
The marriage of Thessaly Bullard and Michael Kinum
by Doris Fischer and Robert Malesardi
Linda London
by Ephraim Back and Tara Blau

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United Way’s United Companies
United Group of Foundations
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ShopRite Supermarkets
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Hilton Garden Inn
Howard Traite
Debbie LaMontagne
Joseph A. La Spisa
Mary Ann Mahoney
Orange Motors
Out of the Ordinary
Hannelore Passonno
Doug and Mary Pratt
Ray Schultz Farm & Greenhouse
Karina Savio & Peace Tree Organics
Terri & Robert Sutton
Barbara Todd
Ungerman Electric
Valoze’s Greenhouse
Tributes in memory of:
John and Margaret Clancy
by Spiral Design Studio
Peggy Emery
by Van Rensselaer Garden Club
Randi Lewis
by Van Rensselaer Garden Club
Alexandra Parry
by WholeFoods Market
Tributes in honor of:
Charlie and Cheryl Barnes
by Drs. Michael and Cheryl DeVito
Bunny Bitten, for Mother’s Day
by Lizabeth Bitten and Gregg W. Brown
The marriage of Thessaly Bullard and Michael Kinum
by Doris Fischer and Robert Malesardi
Linda London
by Ephraim Back and Tara Blau

Tributes in memory of:
Volunteer Feature

In October, we were grateful to have volunteers from the Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany (NABA) help our Veggie Mobile® produce market team assemble Taste and Take bags. Each week, the team selects a simple recipe to share with their customers. Recipes are typed up, samples are prepared and ingredients are bagged. Customers are offered a sample and, if they give it a try, they are given a bag with the recipe and its ingredients. Recipes and pre-bagged produce help make our customers more enthusiastic about trying new foods and eating healthy at home.

We could not do what we do here at Capital Roots without help from organizations like NABA, and it seems that our community partners enjoy volunteering working with us too. NABA volunteer Raheel said, “My favorite part about volunteering is socializing, working and helping others,” as he added apples to Taste and Take bags in October.

Over the years, we have been fortunate enough to work with a diverse group of agencies from all over the Capital District. The Urban Grow Center’s new, handicap accessible volunteer center provides an opportunity for us to expand our network of community partners who help with important projects like Taste and Take.

~ Wishlist ~
* Folding carts for Squash Hunger pick ups
* Gas lawnmowers and rototillers (working)
  * Rainjackets (all sizes)
* Garden carts and wheelbarrows
* Computer monitors (flat screen)
* Plastic storage bins with lids
  * Plastic bread bins
  * Extension ladder
* Good working pickup ladder
  * Snow blower

Donations May 6 - September 15, 2014

Tributes in honor of:
Linda London’s Birthday
by Lauri Rosmarin
Plattner and Rob Plattner
Michael Whitman and
Christine Standish
by Charles M. Liddle III

Support Capital Roots with a donation today!

Name:_________________________
Address:________________________
Phone:_________________________
E-mail:_________________________

□ $35 Friend □ $300 Benefactor
□ $60 Sponsor □ $600 Cultivator
□ $120 Supporter □ $1200 Gardening Angel

Please make your tax deductible check payable to Capital Roots, 594 River Street, Troy, NY 12180.

INTERESTED IN GETTING MORE INVOLVED?
□ Help rescue Squash Hunger produce.
□ Deliver produce with our Veggie Mobile team.
□ Help out around our new office.
18th Annual Garden Bowl
Saturday, January 31, 3:00 -6:00 pm
Uncle Sam Lanes, 600 Fulton Street, Troy

Register at firstgiving.com/cdcg/garden-bowl-2015

Join us for a day of bowling to support our programs. You don’t have to be a good bowler. Just get family, friends, coworkers and neighbors to join your team, register and raise a minimum of $25 to participate. The first 50 people to register and set up a fundraising page will receive a FREE Garden Bowl tee-shirt. There are plenty of trophies and prizes to win - including ski passes, dining certificates, event tickets and more!