In 1975 a strong back-to-the-land movement had been building in America. More Americans were planting vegetable gardens. Dean H. Leith Jr, the CEO of Garden Way, wondered what he could do to help support this movement. In response, Dean created two organizations, Gardens for All in Burlington, VT, and Capital District Community Gardens (now Capital Roots) in Troy.

This is how Dean describes the organization’s founding in a 2007 letter to supporters. “Those early years were a time of learning for Community Gardens,” Dean writes. “We learned to set practical priorities and achievable goals, and meet them, on tight budgets with a staff of two...But by delivering services as promised, and on time, CDCG gradually earned a reputation and acceptance within our community as an organization that played a worthwhile and increasingly important role: helping scores of families make a better life for themselves and their neighbors.”

Dean understood the impact this organization would have. He and his team at CDCG planned and put into action a series of gardens in Troy. They were successful and neighbors were being served. It wasn’t long before Dean was approached by Erastus Corning II, the mayor of Albany, asking for help to implement the program in the Capital. Dean obliged and the rest is a storied and impactful history led by a man who cared so deeply about his community.

Sharon DiLorenzo, who has been with the organization since 1992, clearly remembers the day she met Dean. “I came to this little store front office in downtown Troy for my interview and a man came in,” she recalls. “He looked like a gardener. He had on a flannel shirt, was friendly and warm but carried himself confidently.”

During the early years of the organization, Dean always had his hands in a project for the gardens. “I found all of this stuff,” he would say as he led staff out to his truck filled to the brim with what can only be described as treasures. “Come on, let’s see what we’ve got.” And from there they would create usable items for the gardens or office.

As the organization grew and our headquarters changed time and time again, it was our founder who remained a constant source.
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 southern Saratoga counties.

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FROM OUR FOOD HUB
BY AMY KLEIN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Losing a loved one is never easy. Losing three in less than two weeks is very painful. That’s the loss that the Capital Roots family experienced this January with the passing of our Founder, Dean Leith and two long-time former board members, Chico Christopher and Mary Jane Smith.

Dean passed away on Thursday the 5th, we lost Chico on Monday the 9th and then Mary Jane on Sunday the 15th. And just like that a huge chunk of the history of Capital Roots was gone.

While it had been several years since all three had been on the board together, they would often be seen together at Capital Roots’ gatherings and most certainly at every annual Spring Brunch! Each remained fully connected with our organization, and we them.

Dean was our founder – or “flounder” as he liked to say. He had an endless amount of energy and generosity and a glint in his eye that made him so very special. Mary Jane, founder of Unity House, gave her love to thousands, was devoted to many organizations and was so very modest. Chico was committed to urban greening and helped us plant thousands of trees in Troy and surrounding communities; a sweeter, kinder soul would be hard to find.

Beyond the loss of these three amazing individuals, what struck me most deeply in January was the collective loss of our earlier years that Dean, Mary Jane and Chico represented. I said to Sharon DiLorenzo (who has been at Capital Roots for an astonishing 25 years), “Now it’s up to us to keep the history alive.”

To aid in that endeavor, our Board has created an Honorary Board, called “The Tap Roots” and invited 13 past board members who have served with distinction in the last 40 years to be recognized in the inaugural class along with Dean, Mary Jane and Chico. These members are being recognized for their extraordinary service as past Board Presidents and for extended tenures. This will be one small way to continue to tie our past to our future. And to never forget the legacy of our founders and those who have served over the decades.

Recently at Chico’s memorial service local author and friend, Amy Halloran said about Chico, Dean and Mary Jane that she didn’t think that any of them “sought to change the world. Just to do what felt right.” Truer words could not be spoken. These were all such humble people, doing good work because it’s what came naturally to them. In the end, they changed individual lives, improved neighborhoods and left a lasting imprint on their communities. What an extraordinary legacy to leave.

People are never gone if we remember them. I certainly will remember these three remarkable people and the impact they had on my life and the role they played in creating and nurturing Capital Roots. I will also do my best to make sure all those who follow me will know about Dean, Mary Jane and Chico and all the others who have made a mark on this organization. We are forever in their debt.

BY AMY KLEIN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
of encouragement and drive. He bussed tables at every spring brunch, telling staff it was where the action happened. He would call current Chief Executive Officer Amy Klein at 6am and 11pm so he wouldn’t forget to relay his thoughts, whatever the time of day.

No matter how many years went by, he remained that confident, flannel-clad man whom everyone knew that they could count on.

Even as Dean’s health declined, there he was, with a glint in his eye, quietly watching over our organization, taking pride in all that we had accomplished together.

The first time Dean toured the Urban Grow Center. He had the opportunity to see the conference room that is dedicated to Dean and Liz in recognition of their enormous generosity over the decades. Dean strolled along the upper floor, sitting on one of the desks with another former board member taking in the space his founding organization could now call home. It’s an image we will never forget: our history melded with our future.

When we look around the walls of the Urban Grow Center, we see Dean and his legacy. We hear his recollection of why he started this organization. We listen to his desire to push forward while not forgetting our past.

“In the moment I came here, Dean was always pushing us forward,” Amy recalls. “He had big ideas for what we could do, but he always wanted to be sure that we remembered our roots.”

Dean kept an eye on what was going on at Capital Roots and on the people who worked here. “That always stood out to me,” Sharon recalls. “He really cared.”

Dean was an important part of Capital Roots right up until his passing in January. An organization is lucky when their founder cares deeply enough to remain involved throughout its history. However, an organization is truly blessed when that founder becomes more like a father, (or in Dean’s case an Uncle – “Uncle Dean” for those who are in the know) allowing you to make decisions and learn from them, yet celebrating your accomplishments and pushing you toward greatness.

“When we talk about the grit of Capital Roots, I think of Dean,” Amy says. “His legacy reminds us to preserve our past, but keep moving forward. And so that’s exactly what we will do.”

So to our father, our Uncle Dean, that confident, down-to-earth, hands-in-the-dirt guy, we say “thank you”. Your legacy will live on.

SPIRITS HIGH WHEN INTERACTING WITH HEALTHY SOILS

It is well known that gardening makes people happy. People love the feeling of soil between their fingers as they harvest fresh vegetables and beautify the space around them. The act fosters a sense of accomplishment, and the satisfaction that stems from gardening out in the fresh air under the sun undoubtedly has a positive lingering effect on overall disposition. Just ask our community gardeners!

“For me it’s more about getting back to Mother Nature; I find it therapeutic,” says Jim Owens, who has been participating in the Community Gardens program since 1996. “I’m happy to be planting, tilling and weeding even.”

Mycobacterium vaccae—which we are able to absorb through inhalation and topical soil contact. This organism helps humans generate the mood-elevating hormone serotonin, which relaxes us and functions as a natural antidepressant. Mycobacterium vaccae has also been shown to boost your immune system and is being investigated as a potential treatment for inflammatory illnesses such as arthritis and Crohn’s disease.

“I concentrate on what I’m doing… and all other things (on my mind) are let go. It’s a great feeling,” Jim says. “When I enter the garden and close the gate behind me, I’m refreshed.”

As we develop our 52nd community garden, in memory of our founder, Dean, we can’t help but acknowledge the positive impacts these green spaces have on our communities and neighbors. And as Jim tells us, this research just gives us one more thing to add to that list. Scientists have yet to determine how long we must be exposed to the soil to benefit from Mycobacterium vaccae, but we think the more time in the garden the better.

Get your hands dirty; cultivate a good-mood garden in the Capital Region!


In Memory of Dean H. Leith, Jr.
Help us create this very special community garden with a generous donation.
(See form on page 11)
With growing public interest in the local food movement over the past 20 years, more money, time, and energy is being invested in projects focused on supporting the regional farm economy, with efforts such as Farmer’s Markets and CSAs popping up in big cities and small towns across the country. These projects support local food producers and buyers who have trouble accessing the mainstream food system or who have chosen to participate in the alternative systems. In doing so, the local food movement is rebuilding regional food systems, which once thrived in America not more than a century ago.

In order to coordinate efforts, local food movement leaders have developed a number of tools to inform their work. Food System Assessments are one tool communities employ to provide data-driven information for those working to increase support for local food. These studies are meant to inform funders, policy makers, and social service agencies in their work with all things food related. Food assessments analyze each sector of the food system, production, processing, distribution, and consumption in a given geographic area. Each assessment is unique to the region and reflects the priorities of stakeholders who are involved in the research project development.

For more than a decade, it has been in Capital Roots’ strategic plan to conduct a regional food assessment. After the opening of our regional food hub, the Urban Grow Center, in 2014, we finally had the capacity to spearhead the project; enter the Greater Capital Region Food System Assessment.

Over the next two years, Capital Roots is joining with community partners to conduct a comprehensive regional food system assessment for the 11-counties of the Greater Capital Region foodshed. The goal is to identify opportunities to increase the purchasing of locally produced food. Findings will include information for producers on opportunities to scale-up production, establish connections with wholesale buyers, and identify gaps in regional food system infrastructure. The assessment will determine what is needed to strengthen the regional food economy and will make recommendations to guide regional planning and development.

Second, the assessment will identify methods to increase food security and healthy food access in low-income communities in the four main counties of the Capital Region. We will conduct a community food security assessment with the goal of evaluating the retail food environment and regional food assistance systems. Findings will include information about the different communities in the Capital Region and their identified needs in terms of food access, including barriers to food security, food in high demand, and successful programs and services currently supporting healthy food access and food security. The assessment will lead to the development recommendations for regional stakeholders geared towards supporting the equitable development of our regional food system at the community level.

The Greater Capital Region Food System Assessment will help us to understand the capacity for locally produced food to fill gaps in urban markets, including distribution infrastructure needs and local food processing opportunities. Developing the assets within our region to build the agricultural economy will benefit the health and strength of local economies as well as the greater state of New York.
Planning for the Greater Capital Region Food System Assessment began in the spring of 2016 under Capital Roots’ AmeriCorps VISTA fellow, Marissa Peck, now the Food Assessment Coordinator. The research phase launched in January 2017 and will carry through until the end of summer 2018. Research includes literature reviews of research done on specific topics in our food system, mapping, focus groups, surveys, case studies, and economic analysis of different sectors of the food system. In fall 2018, the findings will be prepared for publication with the final version published by December 2018. The publication will contain a series of briefs geared towards regional stakeholders, such as economic development agencies, policy makers, regional planners, non-profit organizations, and those working directly in the food system, like farmers and distributors. We anticipate that this information will lay the path for the development of a Regional Food Policy Council to advocate for the assessment’s findings and support future regional food system activities.

How to Get Involved
There will be many opportunities for participation in this project. Currently, we are developing a plan for summer research and have opportunities for folks to support our data collection efforts this summer or lend a hand in their area of expertise in the planning and publication of the assessment. A more detailed call for summer participation will go out mid-April. Contact Marissa Peck at foodassessment@capitalroots.org for more information.

A RECORD BREAKING YEAR FOR SQUASH HUNGER

In 2016, Capital Roots’ Squash Hunger program thrived. With assistance from many hardworking volunteers and great partners, a record 85,690 pounds of produce were recovered and distributed to more than 70 food pantries, shelters and soup kitchens throughout the Capital Region. We are so thankful for our partnership with Devin Bulger of Comfort Food Community and the generous farmers who allowed us to glean their fields and donated their surplus produce to feed hungry families.

A new partnership with North Valley Organics in Canaan yielded an unexpected contribution of more than 9,000 pounds of produce, while longtime partners, like AJ Rinella, donated 9,300 pounds of produce. Our collection bins located around the region at retail establishments such as Honest Weight Food Co-op, Niskayuna Co-op, Hewitt’s Garden Centers and Delmar Marketplace totaled 7,222 pounds. We could not have succeeded without these important partners.

In 2017, Capital Roots will continue to build the partnerships forged through the Squash Hunger program while developing new partnerships to support our food recovery efforts. We will also be introducing a new resource to help volunteers assist with the program. The Squash Hunger Produce Drive Toolkit will provide groups with all the tools necessary to host produce drives at businesses, schools, community centers, or in their neighborhood, including a step-by-step guide on getting the drive started, and even marketing materials. Produce drives can be conducted year round which is particularly beneficial in the winter months when produce donations slow. The toolkit offers a wonderful opportunity for groups of all ages and abilities to volunteer with Capital Roots and provide fresh, healthy food to those who need it most.

Contact Cheryl Whilby at squashhunger@capitalroots.org for more information.
Healthy Stores

New Partners!

Lucky Times Grocery and Deli, located at 75 Washington Avenue in Rensselaer, will increase fresh, healthy food access in the northern part of the city where residents have limited opportunities to purchase healthy options. The store is not only receiving products for their new unit provided by Capital Roots, but they are also receiving additional fresh and local items to enhance their deli services. To date, the store has provided more than 750 lbs of healthy food to their neighborhood!

Sheba Grocery and Deli, located at 586 Second Avenue in Troy, will provide fresh, affordable products for north Troy residents. The grocery is located in the middle of a food desert and right across from Kane Apartments, providing a much needed opportunity for surrounding residents to access healthy food right in their neighborhood. Since its launch in late March, more than 200 lbs of healthy food has made its way to neighbors!

New & Upcoming
VIRTUAL Veggie Mobile®

PRODUCE FROM LOCAL PRODUCERS such as:
- Golden Beets
- Asparagus
- Spinach
- Kale
- Radishes

PANTRY ITEMS & SNACKS
- Pixie's Preserves new jam flavors
- Peanut butter
- Dried spices & herbs
- Mountain Winds maple-infused hot & BBQ sauces
- Liquid Assets ground coffee
- Fruit of the Fungi dried mushrooms
- Chobani yogurt
- Apple chips
- Damn Good Jerky new jerky flavors

LOCALLY RAISED MEATS & EGGS
- Grazin’ Acres Farm chicken wings, drumsticks and all-natural hot dogs
- Bornt Family Farms ham steaks
- Common Sense Farm eggs
- Kyer Farm ground pork and breakfast sausage

+ 5 new producer storefronts!
Honoring Our 2016 Volunteers

On January 19, 2017, Capital Roots held our annual Volunteer Appreciation event at the Urban Grow Center to show our gratitude and appreciation for the hard work of our many dedicated volunteers. Each year, we honor two special volunteers who have put considerable time and effort into assisting Capital Roots programs and operations. This year’s honorees were Jim Boswell and Priscilla Fairbank.

Jim has been instrumental in maintaining the flower border around the Produce Project’s 8th Street Urban Farm. At more than 800 linear feet this is no small task, yet Jim took this project on as his own and helped to create something the entire neighborhood can enjoy.

Priscilla has been one of Capital Roots most dedicated Squash Hunger volunteers for three years, performing weekly pickups at the Troy Farmers Market and delivering to local food pantries and soup kitchens. She has also assisted with gleanings at area farms.

Also recognized at this event were members of our Board of Directors, whose terms ended in December – Raymond Smith, John Carl, Ann Pfau, and Bill Karchner. Many thanks to all of our volunteers for their hard work and dedication.

Thank You to Our Sponsors!

Two Decades of Garden Bowl

Capital Roots would like to thank our event sponsors, donors and bowlers for helping to make our 20th Annual Garden Bowl a success. This year, at Uncle Sam Lanes in Troy on January 28th we raised $17,000 to benefit our food access and urban greening programs.

More than 100 bowlers of all ages took part in fundraising for the event. Friends, coworkers and families bonded as they bowled together on teams such as the “Bowling Bees,” and “Collar City Slayers.” Many of our business sponsors also fielded teams, including Envision Architects’ “Spare Me,” SEFCU’s “Healthy Eating,” and the Hodgson Russ “Russel Sprouts” and “Russett Potatoes.” Winners took home great prizes generously donated by 60 local businesses, including trophies, ski passes, concert tickets, hockey tickets, dining gift certificates and shopping gift cards!

Special thanks to our in-kind event sponsors: Uncle Sam Lanes, One Day Signs, Digital X-Press, Troy Cloth and Paper, and Bob Daubney’s Bowling & Billiards. It’s not too early to save the date to participate in 2018 as a bowler, business sponsor or both! Make sure Saturday, January 27th is on your calendar for our 21st Annual Garden Bowl.
Contributions From Our Friends

The following donations were received between
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by A.J. and Ann Amato

John C. Parker Sr.  
by Dana Parker

Alexandra Faith Parry  
by Theresa and David Parry

Dina Santos-Connallon  
by Libby Santos

Susie and Archie Simon  
by Christine Stone

Mary Jane Smith  
by Barbara Bradley and Tom McGuire

by William Karchner

Erye Sneck  
by Van Rensselaer Garden Club

Amy Stock  
by David Merwitz

Vera Tissolo  
by Linda McDonald

Mark Voles  
by Deborah Vogel

SEED DONORS

Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Co.
 ER Seed LLC
 Henry Fields’ Seeds and Nursery
 Honest Weight Food Co-op
 Hudson Valley Seed Company
 John Schneepers Kitchen
 Garden Seeds
 Lowé’s Home Centers, LLC
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IN-KIND DONORS

Sue Gannon
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 Dave Palmer
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SUPPORT CAPITAL ROOTS WITH A DONATION TODAY!

NAME: ____________________________  E-MAIL: ____________________________

PHONE: __________  ADDRESS: ____________________________

☐ In support of the Dean H. Leith, Jr. Memorial Community Garden, I’d like to donate $________

☐ $35 Friend  ☐ $600 Cultivator

☐ $60 Sponsor  ☐ $1200 Gardening Angel

☐ $120 Supporter  ☐ Make me a Harvest Helper for $______ a month.

☐ $300 Benefactor

☐ In honor of

☐ In memory of

WISH LIST

Baskets

Folding carts for Squash Hunger pick ups

Heavy duty utility cart on wheels

Gas lawnmowers and rototillers (working)

Lengthy garden hoses

Computer tech support

Hoes (stirrup preferably)

Garden carts and wheelbarrows

Good working vehicles

Water barrels

Good working all-terrain mower

Set of metal ramps for loading equipment

Laptop computers

Long handled shovels

Silverware

Cake platters and pie servers

Jumper cables

iPods and iPhones 5s or newer

High capacity stapler

Adding Machine (working)

To make a donation, call: 518-274-8685

I’D LIKE TO GET INVOLVED

☐ Volunteer at the annual Spring Plant Sale

☐ Spend a Thursday or Saturday at the Produce Project 8th Street Urban Farm

☐ Deliver produce to area food pantries for Squash Hunger
Sunday, May 7, 2017
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Empire State Plaza | Albany, NY

Advance Sale Tickets: $25   Children under 10 eat FREE
All proceeds benefit Capital Roots

Tickets & Info
www.capitalroots.org
events@capitalroots.org
518-274-8685