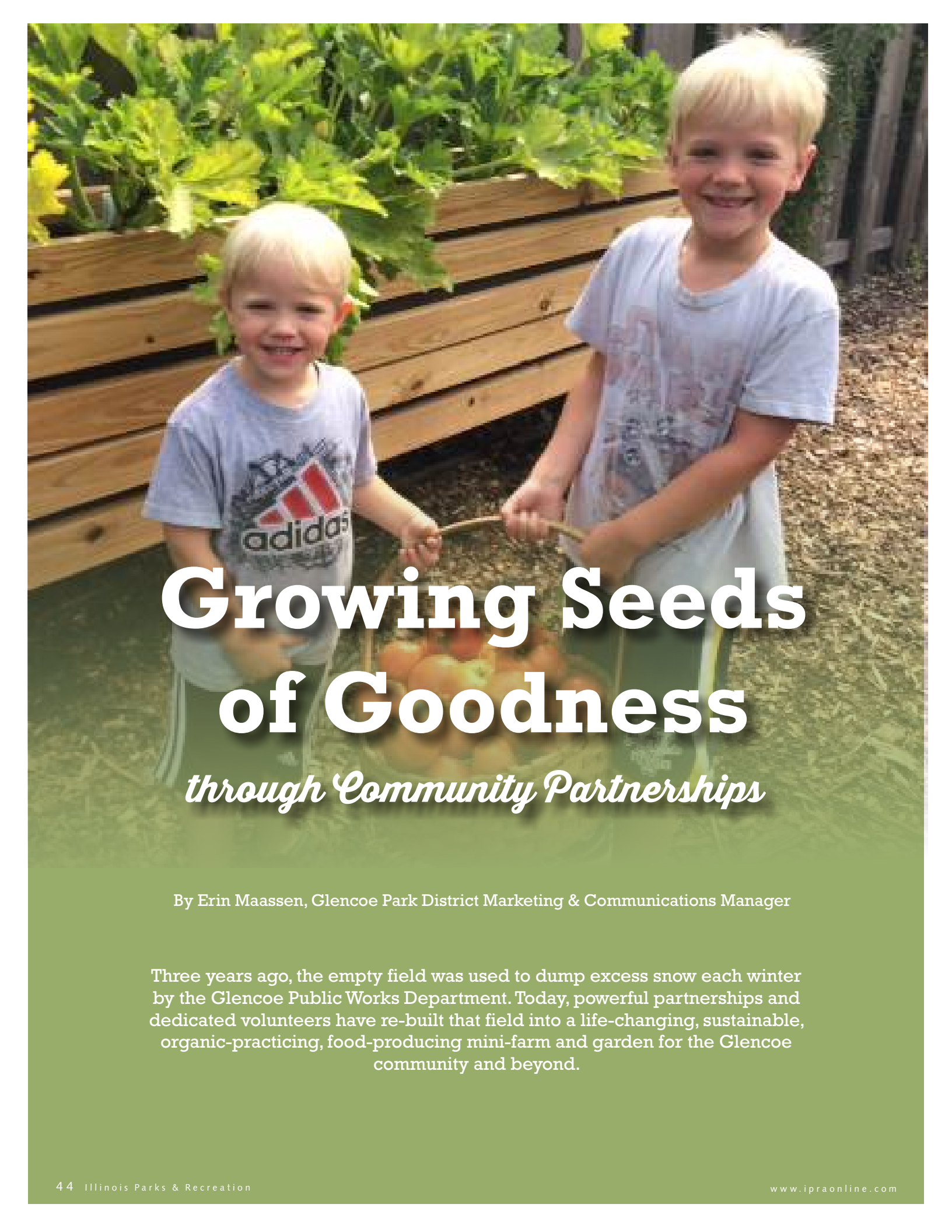


A photograph of two young boys with blonde hair, smiling and holding a woven basket filled with ripe red tomatoes. They are standing in a garden with a wooden raised bed in the background, which is filled with green leafy plants. The boy on the left is wearing a light blue t-shirt with an Adidas logo, and the boy on the right is wearing a light blue t-shirt with a graphic design. The background shows a wooden fence and more greenery.

Growing Seeds of Goodness

through Community Partnerships

By Erin Maassen, Glencoe Park District Marketing & Communications Manager

Three years ago, the empty field was used to dump excess snow each winter by the Glencoe Public Works Department. Today, powerful partnerships and dedicated volunteers have re-built that field into a life-changing, sustainable, organic-practicing, food-producing mini-farm and garden for the Glencoe community and beyond.



Our mission is to teach by example the 'hows and whys' of growing food organically, composting, and other ways of lessening our carbon footprints.

The Glencoe Community Garden (GCG) was established by Am Shalom as a gift to the community to celebrate the Temple's 40th Anniversary. The Village of Glencoe quickly recognized the importance of bringing the GCG to life and offered to find space for the garden. "The Village was pleased to be a part of the Glencoe Community Garden project. The Garden is another great example of the many positive initiatives that define the community of Glencoe," said Paul Harlow, former Glencoe Village Manager. "Once we secured space, we really started to dream," said Vivian Nitzberg, GCG co-founder. "We thought the community could work together to grow tomatoes and peppers and give the produce to those in need."

Glencoe Park District's Horticulturist Tom McDonald and his assistant, Karen Keefe, stepped in to offer space in the Park District's greenhouse and advice on starting seeds.

The first few months proved to be a learning opportunity. "That year, volunteers planted seeds in early March and then left for spring break. It was too early to start," said Tom. "But we learned. What the GCG has accomplished in three years exceeded every expectation we had. The enthusiasm and dedication of the garden's core volunteers has made this a successful endeavor."

Plans expanded beyond tomatoes and peppers. By the end of its inaugural year, GCG, sandwiched between Glencoe Park District's Shelton Park and the train tracks, yielded over 1,700 hundred pounds of food and donated it to local pantries throughout the Chicagoland area. Basil, beets, beans, broccoli, carrots, cilantro, eggplant, kale, squash, zucchini and turnips are lovingly grown and cared for by a group of over 100 volunteers each year. These volunteers also hand-built and installed the fence, barn, greenhouse and each planting bed in the 5,000 square foot oasis. In addition, GCG now features a drip irrigation system, rain barrel collection, solar panels to power a fan and pump, accessible planting beds, and greenhouse growing.

"Each year, the GCG gets so much better at growing and producing crops," said Tom. At the conclusion of its third year of operations, the GCG donated over 6,000 pounds of organic produce to those in need.

"We wanted the Garden to bring the community together, so it was very important for us to work with the Glencoe Park District," said Jim Goodman, GCG co-founder. "The Park District offered support and assistance, from digging fence posts to showing us how to keep our tomatoes from falling over and how to continue to be ecologically sensitive."

"Our mission is to teach by example the 'hows and whys' of growing food organically, composting, and other ways of lessening our carbon footprints. 100% of our harvests are donated to local food kitchens, pantries, and other charitable organizations," said Nina Schroeder, GCG co-founder. Each season, the GCG harvests and delivers produce to those in need, including The ARK Northwest, La Casa Norte, Breakthrough, Midwest Workers Association, Am Shalom Helping the Homeless, Family Promise Chicago Northshore, and Greater Bethlehem Healing Temple.

In addition, the GCG offers a myriad of educational, social action, and community opportunities in a safe, cooperative environment accessible to all individuals. In the spirit of community partnership, the GCG began working with the Park District's Recreation Department to offer joint community programs.

Throughout the year, the two organizations work together to offer free community classes on healthy cooking, organic gardening, composting, and topics related to the eco-system. The Park District supplies space to meet inside during the colder months; the Garden hosts outdoor education programs during the summer months.



“Our partnership allows us to reach more people, stretch the tax dollar, and pool resources when creating programs and events,” said Beckie Korzyniewski, Assistant Superintendent of Recreation at the Glencoe Park District. “Working together and cross marketing has enabled us to diversify our adult program offerings and both organizations benefit greatly from the captured audience.”

“Everyone loves our classes. We offer healthy snacks from the garden and teach them something new. Everyone walks away happy,” said Nina.

“Our collaborative efforts serve as a springboard for our community to become more aware of environmental improvements,” said Beckie. “The vision of both organizations is to enrich lives and create memorable experiences. By working together, we are aligning ourselves with another organization with similar goals. The community outreach is a win-win for the Garden and the Park District. One thrives due to the efforts of the other and vice versa.”

The programming is starting to reach a new, younger audience. The GCG started coming to Park District special events with seed activities for kids. “We had a tray of bush beans, and we asked a group of four-year-olds to help us separate the seeds from dirt as an activity station at a special event,” said Vivian. “We decided to plant the seeds in a corner and see if the beans grew.”

The “Park District Beans” did grow...and grow and grow. When the Park District hosted a family night at the adjacent park with GCG, “the kids were thrilled to see how prolific their seeds had become.”

The Garden's proximity to the Green Bay Trail and playground encourages families to come visit. “People often wander into the Garden and we engage them in games, invite them to pick plants, smell the herbs, and taste fresh produce,” said Jim. “The best is when grandparents bring grandchildren to help, because caring for the Garden is something they can do together.”

The GCG and Park District hope to expand their youth programming in the coming months. “We'd love to get the summer camp kids involved in a project in the future,” said Vivian.

Beyond the Park District, the GCG has partnered with local churches, synagogues, schools, and community organizations to create volunteer harvest days. The raised beds and accessible site make the Garden available to all ages and abilities.

“The Glencoe Community Garden is a wonderful example of the deep roots in our community that will continue to grow and have a lasting impact on so many people. For those who will work to build the garden, for those who will toil in the earth, and for those who will benefit from the produce; this really is a unique example of so many people coming together to help make our world just a little bit better. For that is really our mission after all,” said Am Shalom's Rabbi Steven Stark Lowenstein.

To learn more about the GCG or to find volunteer opportunities, please visit www.glencoecommunitygarden.com.