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GARDENER'S SUPPLY GIVES TOP HONORS TO FOUNDER OF COMMUNITY GARDENING GROUP IN ONE OF AMERICA'S POOREST CITIES

More than 139,000 servings of fresh produce grown in Camden, NJ

BURLINGTON, VT - Mike Devlin, founder and director of the Camden City Garden Club in Camden, New Jersey, has been honored as the grand prize winner in Gardener's Supply's Garden Crusader program.

Devlin has spearheaded efforts by the Camden City Garden Club (CCGC) over the past 26 years to create and support approximately 90 food-producing community gardens in Camden's urban neighborhoods. More than 60 of these gardens have been established in the last two years, to help give residents of this impoverished city access to fresh, nutritious and affordable produce in an area that has been designated as a "food desert."

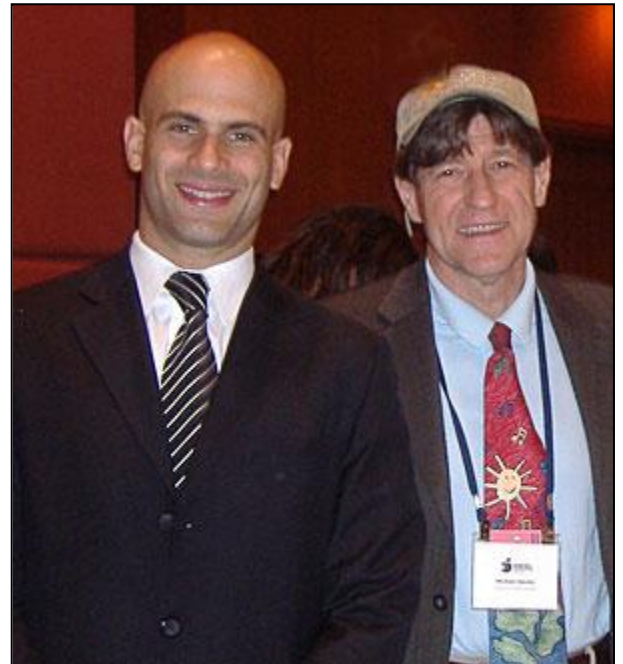
The statistics for Camden have long been grim. It is frequently described as the poorest small city in the country – and among the most dangerous. Most families live below the poverty level, half of its residents are under 20 years old, and 60 percent of its young people don't graduate from high school.

According to a new [study by the University of Pennsylvania](#), the city now has another, more positive, designation: Based on population, Camden is home to perhaps the fastest growing community gardens in the country.

These community gardens grew more than 30,000 pounds of food in 2009 – that's 139,000 servings of fresh produce! – and are on track to produce even more fresh fruits and vegetables this year, as gardeners grow their cool-weather crops into November.

Mike Devlin believes that gardens can 'grow' people as well as food, and to that end, he initiated several gardening programs in addition to community gardens, to address the needs of Camden youth:

- The 4.5-acre Camden Children's Garden, now in its 11th year, is educational as well as fun.
- The Youth Employment and Training Program, in its 16th year, has employed over 300 at-risk youth.
- The GrowLab Program, in its 21st year, uses horticulture to teach subjects ranging from nutrition to science to about 550 Camden school children each year.



Mike Devlin, right, with White House Chef Sam Kass. Kass also serves as the senior policy adviser on Healthy Eating Initiatives and is heavily involved in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's anti-obesity initiative, which funds the Camden City Garden Club's Community Gardening Program.

"All of us at Gardener's Supply are so pleased to honor Mike for his vision and leadership to help his city's poorest urban residents build gardens, grow their own fresh food and to create a community," said Sue Chayer, Garden Crusader coordinator, Gardener's Supply. Gardener's Supply, an award-winning and earth-friendly gardening company, is based in Burlington, Vt.

“There is plenty of land, plenty of hunger, and a real desire among residents to build gardens and grow fresh fruits and vegetables,” said Devlin. “We want to thank Gardener’s Supply, a company we’ve always respected as much for its gardening gear as its mission to support community gardening.”

According to Devlin, growth of community gardening in Camden is driven by intense need — and the surprising amount of available land. One full-service supermarket serves 80,000 city residents. At the same time, there are 12,000 abandoned lots in Camden, and the city owns 4,000 of them.

In 2009, the CCGC partnered with 24 Camden churches and other faith-based organizations to fight childhood obesity through community gardening and nutrition education. This was supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as part of an innovative faith-based initiative. In addition to establishing community gardens, the Camden program offers workshops and barbeques to teach the urban gardeners how to cultivate their sites and how to prepare healthy meals. The CCGC supplies local gardeners with materials such as compost, fencing, seeds, plants and fertilizer to maintain their own gardens.

Devlin realized that gardening was the key in a city with so much empty land and a serious need for fresh, inexpensive produce. In addition to leading the surge in Camden community gardening, two years ago Mike started a committee of community and government leaders to develop the first Camden Food Security Advisory Board to help address Camden’s lack of fresh food resources. The Camden Children’s Garden also installed a mini Farm Stand to sell fresh, local produce to the community, in addition to hosting food events that feature local growers and community recipes.

At a time when many residents in poorer communities rely on community gardens for their food, retroactive cuts in funding have severely limited current and future work.

As the University of Pennsylvania study observed, “Food production in the Camden gardens is expanding the options, availability, and interest in fresh, healthy, local vegetables” in this urban community. “Children and new adult gardeners ... are learning to grow their own [vegetables] and appreciate how carrots taste when pulled straight from the ground.”

Devlin notes, “It’s great to see people getting together and building community. And growing food.”

Founded in 1983, Gardener’s Supply (www.gardeners.com) is an employee-owned company of avid gardeners providing garden-tested, earth-friendly products combined with practical information. Located in Burlington, Vermont, the company has won many awards for its patented products and innovative management style. Gardener’s Supply has supported community gardening since its start by donating 8% of its profits back to the community and founded The Intervale Center and also started the Garden Crusader Awards, an award program honoring individuals who make difference in their community through their passion for gardening. Please visit www.gardeners.com for photos of Mike Devlin and Camden’s community gardens.

The Camden City Garden Club, Inc. is an organization that has been greening, beautifying and helping to feed the people of Camden, NJ for 26 years. The Club is a non-profit (501)(c)(3) environmental and educational organization. The Community Gardening Program is made possible by an endowment from the William Penn Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. To learn more about Camden City Garden Club and recent University of Pennsylvania study, please visit www.camdenchildrensgarden.org. To schedule interview with Mike or visit the gardens, please contact Mike Devlin at 609-707-7677 or Tracy Tomchik at 215-219-4803.

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