

New Garden in the Bronx 'Creates a Community'

Residential Garden Provides Food, Community Space to Residents of Middle-, Low-Income Housing

By
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A view of the courtyard behind 920 Kelly St. in the Bronx that is set to open as a garden. *Craig Warga for The Wall Street Journal*

Shattered bottles, bags of trash and a broken cinder-block wall distinguished the derelict courtyard behind 920 Kelly St. in the South Bronx nearly three years ago when new developers took it over. Today, raised growing beds are home to sprouting tomato plants, cabbage, squash, collard greens and many other herbs and vegetables.

The garden, which was scheduled to officially open Thursday, is part of a growing number of residential gardens that provide food and community space to residents of middle- and low-income housing.

"In the past five years, we've seen it boom," said Gerard Lordahl of Grow NYC, an environmental nonprofit organization that worked with developer John Crotty to land more than \$300,000 in grants to create the garden. While Grow NYC has specialized for the past 40 years in community gardens

that are open to the public, the Kelly Street Garden is the biggest residential cultivation space the group has helped open.



The area in April 2011 *John Warren*

The entire reclaimed space is about 8,500 square feet—about a fifth of an acre—including 2,000 square feet covered by the 11 growing beds.

Grow NYC estimates the Kelly Street Garden will produce \$43,000 worth of produce for the 81 units in five buildings that will have access to it. That amounts to a savings of roughly \$500 a family (if all units are occupied). The garden will be watered with 250,000 gallons of rainwater that will be captured each year.

"I think this can be a model for low-income developments across the city," Mr. Crotty said.

A residential committee has been established to manage the garden. Mr. Crotty's partners brought on two caretakers to help ensure diligent oversight.

Mr. Crotty's development company, Workforce Housing Group, used federal money to rehabilitate four buildings along Kelly Street into affordable apartments.



Jennifer Foster and granddaughter Anlya Tittle, 3, in the garden. *Craig Warga for The Wall Street Journal*

Carolyn Waring, who has lived on Kelly Street since 1967, said the renovations and garden had made things better around the complex. "Before, this place was below zero. Let's be real," said Ms. Waring, as she watered plants. "The garden creates a community that cuts across age and culture."

The building's tenants are largely African-American and Latino, and they have found a new opportunity to bond in the garden. It comprises traditional herbs and vegetables from Latin cooking, such as epazote and serrano peppers, as well as those from African-American cuisine, such as collard greens and squash.

The garden provides a secure food source, which is badly needed in the South Bronx, but it also gives the residents something to organize around, which Ms. Waring said was even more important.

"Lots of people around here are being priced out and this gives us a chance to talk about those issues as well," she said. "It's more than a garden."