



Daily Times • Hannah Piecuch

Master gardener and Community Garden Coordinator Gail Tatangelo, left, talks about gardening with, from left, Calla Williams, teacher Shawn Henderson and Katelyn Cusick in the greenhouse at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry.

A greener middle school

A new garden sprouts for Coventry students

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COVENTRY—The middle school hot house is full of plants.

It was full of storage a year ago, says Science Teacher Shawn Henderson, but when the community garden got started in Coventry, he decided to work with some of his students and students at the After School Academy to grow vegetables.

Last year about 50 Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry students helped plant and tend squashes and zucchinis and other healthy crops to donate to the Coventry Food Bank, he said.

This year, eight-graders Calla Williams and Katelyn Cusick are taking what they learned a little further and trying to get the whole middle school to compost.

Cusick's family composts at home now, and after working in the greenhouse a little she thought it would be a good practice to bring to her school.

With the cafeteria trying to serve healthier food, it just seemed like a good idea to compost the leftovers, she said. So far her team, Obsidian and the Sapphire team are composting the leftovers from their lunches.

To spread her idea to another team, Cusick wrote Principal Dr. Michael Almeida for permission, and then gave a PowerPoint presentation for her team and the Sapphire team.

Getting up in front of 100 people was intimidating, but Cusick thought composting was a good enough reason.

Now, Cusick and Williams bring five gallon paint pails with them to the cafeteria every day.

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Katelyn Cusick waters the vegetable crops at the middle school greenhouse.

Garden

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After lunch period of Obsidian and Sapphire, they collect the compostables and walk them out to a compost barrel outside the hothouse.

She started about two months ago, Cusick said, so it's going to be a bit before it takes off. "Some days we get

tons of things and other days we don't get anything," she said. "But I'd like to see the whole school doing it."

Some of the plants in the hot house have been raised from seeds by the middle schoolers, others were planted by elders at the senior center or the other volunteers helping with

Coventry's Harvest from the Heart Community Garden, located in front of the Town Hall Annex on Flat River Road.

A whole raised bed of carrots planted by the middle school students is flourishing in the hot house right now. But they lost this spring's beans, squashes, pumpkin, lettuce and tomatoes, Cusick said, because of a draft that swept through the green house a few weeks ago. The plants were doing well but they couldn't

handle the cold.

But a set back like that isn't going to discourage these students. Williams enjoys being in the greenhouse, she said. "I think is really cool because I love plants and stuff." Growing things to donate to the food bank makes it even better, she added.

Henderson brings kids into the greenhouse so they can be involved in where food comes from, he said.

"So far there's been a really positive response," he said.

"They've learned a lot. Starting out some kids didn't know how plants form, but now they've been able to see it happen."

Master Gardener Gail Tatanleo, who launched the community garden last year, loves having the kids involved, she said.

"Seeing these kids get back to the earth—not on the internet or a computer—but doing something hands-on is great. It is about them becoming aware of their surroundings."