

DAILY NEWS

Donor, Sparked by Memories of Grandparents, Helps Intervale Green Open Greenhouse

About 16 families at the Crotona East development maintain a rooftop garden, which produces 1,600 pounds of fresh produce a year. The affordable housing complex is run by the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp.

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John Montgomery (l.) and Farm Manager David Torres take in the roof garden on top of the Intervale Green affordable housing development. Montgomery donated \$1,900 to help build a greenhouse at the complex so residents can continue to grow vegetables and herbs year round.

[John Montgomery](#) knows the importance of fresh produce.

The Manhattan resident's grandparents grew tomatoes, spinach, peppers, grapes and all varieties of herbs in an oversized garden on Morris Ave. for more than 60 years.

Using two vacant lots behind their home as a miniature farm, the Italian immigrants made sure their families ate their share of fresh vegetables and fruits.

That's why Montgomery felt compelled to contribute when he heard about a fund-raising campaign to build a greenhouse in a Crotona East affordable housing complex.

The 33-year-old donated nearly \$2,000 to help build the hothouse in the courtyard of the Intervale Green affordable housing development.

"The farming of fruits and vegetables were an integral part of daily life for my family," Montgomery said. "They were strong proponents of not only healthy eating, but the overall life benefits of working the land."

Residents of Intervale Green have been carrying on the tradition and tilling the soil since 2010, when a rooftop farm was installed on their building.

"The kids can't get enough of it," said resident Vivian Manderville. "They love seeing the whole process from seed to serving it up on the table. They're fascinated by it."



Greenhouse built in the courtyard of Intervale Green through donations raised on a crowd funding website. The biggest donor, John Montgomery, is the grandson of Italian immigrants who once farmed in the area.

About 16 families help maintain the rooftop garden, which produces 1,600 pounds of fresh produce a year.

The new greenhouse, located just outside the building's main lobby, will be used for incubating seeds and growing carrots, peas and a mixture of herbs that tenants of the 128-unit complex can use throughout the winter.

The eco-friendly apartment building is run by the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp.

"Four-seasons growing means fresh vegetables, roof-to-table, and the opportunity to cook and eat at home," said Nancy Biberman, the founder and president of the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation.

Biberman's group organized the fund-raiser for the new grow site through a crowd-funding site online.

The nonprofit raised more than \$7,000 to get the project up and running before the winter set in.

Montgomery was so impressed by the project that he became its biggest donor.

The charitable tax manager said he made the donation in honor of his grandfather Pompeo Mazella and his granduncle Pasquale Mazella, who ran the Morris Ave. farm together.

But at a dedication ceremony on Wednesday, Montgomery said it was also about the future.

"I hope that this will be the first of many," he said of the growhouse. "And that we can pass on that legacy on to the other generations."

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