

The Cycle of Recovery and Renewal at St. Christopher's

BY CATHERINE GARNSEY

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven... a time to plant, and a time to reap"
Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

Tramal, a client of St. Christopher's Inn, a ministry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, has discovered the time to plant and the time to reap.

He has also clearly found his purpose while working on his recovery at Renewal Farm, a one-acre organic vegetable garden in Garrison. Just six months ago, Tramal was homeless on the streets of New York, when Project Renewal, a non-profit organization based in Manhattan, picked him up and brought him to St. Christopher's Inn at Graymoor for shelter and a chance for a new life.

"I'm from the Bronx where there are no farms, so this has been a good experience for me working here," Tramal told the PCN&R on a visit there Friday. "While I am showing love and care for these plants, I feel like my soul is growing along with them. I get so excited every morning before we come over because I can't wait to see what has grown overnight and what has been transformed through the work of my hands."

The stated mission of Project Renewal is "to end homelessness in New York by helping homeless men and women move from the streets to health, homes, and jobs. They offer housing, healthcare, addiction and mental health treatment, and job training and placement to help clients rebuild a life of dignity."

In 2008, Project Renewal partnered with St. Christopher's Inn to operate this farm as a six- to nine-month treatment and work-training program for 24 men homeless men who needed to learn how to maintain their sobriety, develop employable skills, and learn good work habits in order to obtain jobs and housing.

The land use is provided by The Garrison Inn. Officially titled, "The Farm Market Stand Collaboration with Project Renewal," the venture continues this year with about 20 men who have chosen this outpatient program as part of their discharge planning from St. Christopher's Inn.

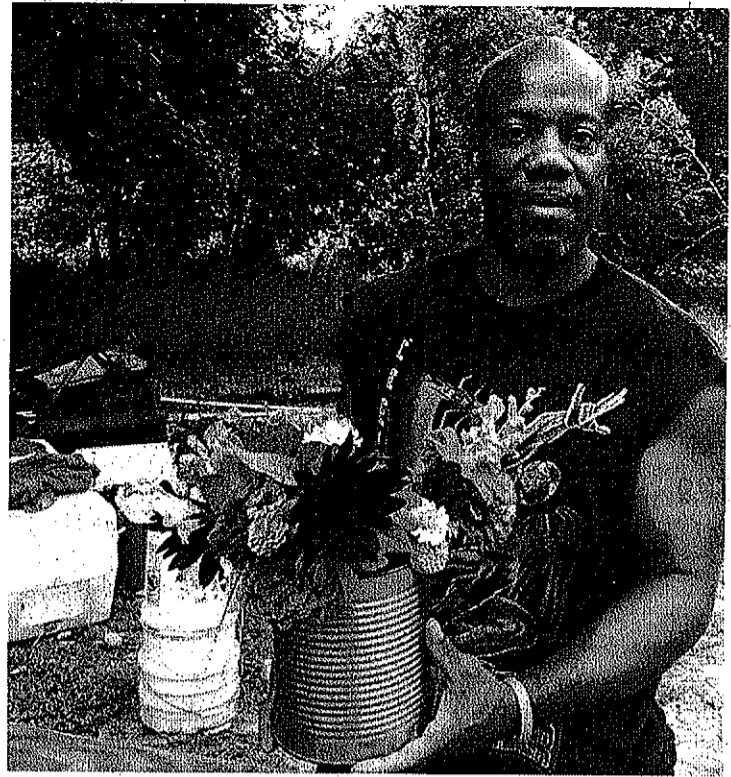
Dave, from New York City, is one of the participants. "When they asked me if I would like to go and work on a farm, I said, sure!" he said with a big grin. "I thought that I would be taking care of horses and cows and other animals. This is something entirely different, but, hey, I'm taking it any way that I can."

William, also in recovery, is the farm manager who has worked with Project Renewal for 3 years. "We used to be in Chester, NY, but when that closed we moved the whole operation over here," he said. Pointing to a large greenhouse on the property, he explained that the structure also had to be moved to Garrison and that the men from St. Christopher's Inn helped to make that happen. He told how the greenhouse was dismantled, piece by piece, support by support, and then reassembled at the new location. "It was a really big job,

digging those supports out of the rock and setting them up here, but this gave our men a sense of ownership, working that hard for something that benefits us all."

William added, "Our program gives addicts in recovery structure and motivation and it teaches these men how to finish a project and take pride in what they do." He went on to explain that since this is an organic farm that uses no pesticides, destructive insects can be a problem. Last year, they bought a batch of ladybugs that effectively kept the enemy insect population down. Praying mantises can be helpful, too. "Last fall, we caught a praying mantis in the garden and put it in the greenhouse," he said. "He ate bugs in there all winter long. By the spring, he was so huge; we could easily spot him anytime we entered the greenhouse."

The planting season never seems to end at this farm. On Friday, a large portion of the field appeared to have been newly cultivated, and stripped of all plants. William reported that were preparing to sow a third crop of lettuce, spinach, and Swiss chard there. The men plant different varieties of vegetables, herbs, and flowers every two weeks during the growing season, so there is always something to harvest. In October, they will be sowing garlic seeds and iris bulbs that will be covered with mulch and fertilized, will then winter under the snow, and be ready to reap in May. Other vegetable and flower seeds will be sown in the greenhouse in the late winter and will be planted as strong seedlings as soon as the



David displays fresh flowers grown on the farm.

frost is over, in a collaborative cycle of physical rebirth for the crops and spiritual rebirth for these men.

Most of the farm's bounty goes to the two restaurants at the Garrison Golf Club in exchange for the use of the land. But there is enough left over to supply the Graymoor Spiritual Life Center kitchen with beets, lettuce, summer squash, tomatoes, and even flowers for their dining room. The Renewal Farm also operates a market stand open to the public on Thursdays at the Hudson Highlands Land Trust parking lot on Rte. 9D and on Fridays and Sundays at the St. Christopher Inn Thrift Shop at Graymoor. Cynthia Gerber, Development Associate at St. Christopher's Inn,

was also there for the tour of the farm. She wanted to check out the progress of the vegetables that will be served at the Garrison Inn during the upcoming Annual Golf Classic at the Garrison Golf Club that she has organized for Monday, September 13. "Isn't it amazing that we will be raising money to support the men and programs of St. Christopher's Inn and at the same time enjoying the fruits of their labors?"

For more information about St. Christopher's Inn and the Annual Golf Classic on September 13th, go to christophersinn-graymoor.org or call Cynthia Gerber at 800-424-0027. For more information on Project Renewal, go to projectrenewal.org.

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