

# Knowlton Academy to build school garden

Helping the children to grow, a concept eagerly embraced by the wide community

By Ann Davidson

The ETSB is on board, the town is on board, and the community is abuzz while it embraces a dynamic garden project at Knowlton Academy in TBL that was seeded in mid-July and is growing in leaps and bounds. The three-phase design is on paper, and the school community is hoping to make headway before the snow falls.

It's a dream that Shelley Mizener has had for almost ten years, a concept that she has been pitching with few grasping the somewhat nebulous and leggy master plan. However, through this concrete garden plan that was seeded in mid-July and is sprouting like a Jack-in-the-Beanstalk bean, Mizener has been able to demonstrate the merits of the process within her master plans. She claims that it has been a totally organic happening with natural connections.

The project will be developed in three stages with building a greenhouse first, then readying the gardens, and eventually planting fruit and non-allergenic nuts. The school is on a large enough property to accommodate the plan. The organizers are counting on it to root the notion of stewardship while strengthening community and social development and facilitating healthy lifestyles that feed academic achievement. It is also a good fit for training young people skills that they can take to employment in a region that relies on agro-tourism.

"It all started when Richard Gagnon dropped into Foster Gardens, where I am working," Mizener said. "He told me that he is planning his retirement and wants to set up a greenhouse. I said why not at the school where the kids and the community can profit too. It's a big extension to what the owners of Foster Gardens, Rémi and Alexia Lamontagne have been doing." According to Mizener, the couple has been inviting students from the local schools to visit their greenhouses for many years. Mizener

grabbed Gagnon in an instant. A plan developed, Mizener made a couple of calls to people who might be interested, and from there it just mushroomed. The plan was presented to the governing board, which barely blinked before sanctioning it. Principle Renalee Gore made it clear that they could use the property. Gore says that she and her staff cannot be responsible for organizing infrastructure, but is amenable for the group to use the school name and property.

Gagnon, elated about the outcome, said, "For the school to go forward with a project like this, its governing board must sanction it. They did not hesitate. They just loved it — everyone — it was unanimous. It was Mizener and Jennifer Ruggins-Muir who came with me to present it and they were amazing. Since then so many others have committed, including Stephanie Marks."

Gagnon is a commissioner for the ETSB and says that this project fits well into the ETSB culture. Massey-Vanier has just hired a teacher for an agricultural course and already there are 28 students signed up for it while both Sutton Elementary and Heroes' Memorial School in Cowansville have gardens. He sees the KA Garden project as one that teaches sustainability.

"In this world where housing, food, and water are becoming a premium with shortages mounting, it is important to teach the kids to take the edge off. By learning to grow their own, they will." Gagnon also wants them to know the importance of growing bounty that is natural and not laced with GMOs or chemicals. The program that KA Gardens is offering will be incorporated in all the classes. "We are hoping that it will serve as a model and that it will be shaped for Massey-Vanier students as well. And it should complement the new agricultural class at the high school and it is a viable model that is transferrable across the country."

"In order to get the kids to stay in



STEPHEN THOMPSON

Stephanie Marks and Shelley Mizener were at Townshippers' Day pitching the new KA Garden project that, gaining momentum and velocity, a project and learning model that includes the wide community, a model that is transferrable to any school across the country.

school there must be something that interests them," he says. "There is art, music, sports, cooking, and now there will be gardening. ... We want to give students a reason to stay in school. We want the students to build a sense of worth. This project is almost like a magical bullet. The school board endorses the notion of 'Attachment Theory.' Whether it is a teacher or a volunteer all it takes is a subject that interests the student and one person that will have a lasting impact on the student's confidence. It gives the student a safe place to go to if it is

needed.

Mizener explains that it's about capacity building, drawing on the resources in the community, and giving back to them. It's about building a network, strengthening relationships within for the sake of sustainability.

Chef and mother of three and 100-mile foodie Jennifer Ruggins-Muir says that Mizener invited her to get involved. Ruggins is making a point of feeding her brood with produce that is obtainable within a 100-mile radius. Already

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## Church Bulletins

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Knowlton United Church, 234 Knowlton Road (450-243-6078). A warm welcome is extended to all. Handicapped access available.

### ST. GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

130 Principale, Granby, welcomes everyone for Sunday service at 11 a.m. All welcome. Bienvenue a tous. Reverend Richard Gauthier, rector. Information: 450-372-2197.

### ST. JAMES ANGLICAN CHURCH - FOSTER

We open our doors to welcome you on Sunday September 25 at 9:15 for a Service of Morning Prayer, at the little

church on the hill, 725 Lakeside, Foster. Join us afterwards to visit over refreshments. Everyone is welcome.

### ST. PAUL'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

24 St. Paul's Road, Knowlton. St. Paul's - a dynamic, diverse community pursuing and serving Jesus in the Eastern Townships. Please note that there will be one blended service at 9:30 a.m. on September 4 returning to our regular 8 and 10 services (traditional, contemporary and modern music and format) on September 11. Please check out our new website: [www.stpaulsknowlton.ca](http://www.stpaulsknowlton.ca). Messy Church every third Wednesday of the month starting September 21!

### TRINITY ANGLICAN CHURCH

The Church with a "Heart" 409 South Street, Cowansville. All Sunday services are at 10:30 a.m. Come and join us as we

endeavor to learn and practice God's loving will. We'd love to welcome you. Reverend George Campbell. Information: 450-955-3325 (leave message).

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