

# Community garden to bring food full circle

By Garry Bowen

Imagine, if you will, being seated at your favorite family restaurant, and the server arrives promptly, takes your entree order, and then invites you to indulge yourself at their newly-revamped salad bar, beckoning with an offer that includes our colorful, fresh, and tasty homegrown produce. Would that make your choice of eating place a secure choice to revisit, and inspire you to tell others of the experience?

That is now a realistic plan taking shape in South Lake Tahoe for both our neighbors and our visitors.



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In mid-December, some key players in town created a year-end present for the community, consistent with the work of the city's Sustainability Commission, South Tahoe Refuse, Embassy Suites, both Marriotts, Zephyr Cove Resort, and a smattering of restaurants, they are partnering on a time and motion study to determine routing of all food waste to a composting facility in Carson Valley. Part of that determination will also factor in bringing back to Tahoe a high-quality, balanced compost to grow high-quality yields of the most productive vegetables, those that offer the most value and the least loss of nutrients through travel, not to mention much better taste and the value of freshness. We will also offer space for the

citizens to work, to grow special varieties, and to learn from each other.

In mid-September, an article under the title, Sustainable Food Initiative Gaining Traction in Tahoe appeared in *Lake Tahoe News*. That article was timed to coincide with (1) National Organic Month, and (2) that day's South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting, in order to share with the council and residents a project important to South Lake Tahoe's revitalized future, and as well the well-being of the entire community. It is geared to be completely sustainable in providing the highest level of sustenance for all, from now on.

The article proposed "a comprehensive idea to cover all the points" of that discussion about food production and its proper place in a sustainable community which was soon to be introduced and done in such a way as to be fun and engaging for the entire South Shore. As it is to be year-round, educational programs can be included.

Progress is now far enough along to announce a proposed Community Garden project with far-reaching implications for the future local economy. The two project parts, soil and a growing facility can now be explained in more detail, in preparation for a more formal rollout in the near future.

The first part of a considered garden is the growing medium, comprised of fresh compost and organic matter, with which growth is achieved by the absorption of minerals, nutrients and light. The second part is considered the production medium, which includes soil, but also surroundings conducive to the best growth. For this project, a specially-designed solar geodesic dome will allow a community gathering place and be as well truly year-round by virtue of an added LED lighting system enhancing growth through the use of special growth spectrum. There is also a water tank for thermal mass, heated by the sun, which creates the proper inside humidity,

monitored by an automatic vent on its roof. These features accommodate optimum growing conditions within the sphere, which is why a system whereby all snow and rain water can be captured is currently being explored prior to final plans. Snow and rain water (considered hard, sometimes needing to be softened) are high in mineral content, excellent for growing high-quality produce, as, for example, minerals are mostly what's leached out of the soil in the "agribasket" of Central California. With this Tahoe design, it will be possible for us to remineralize soil through simple gravity and water flow.

But what is food growing without organic soil?

In having one of the best in the West soil entities right in our backyard, Full Circle Compost is partnered with the others mentioned above to make the most Sierra-conducive soil possible. As food waste is considered mostly alkaline, some of the forest waste (mostly acid) created by the ongoing fuel reduction projects will be added to make a very balanced soil – this is important as the more balanced the soil, the less water is necessary to gain the same yield. By absorbing and retaining water better, the forces of photosynthesis are better served to provide a better product.

The garden will be oriented to a particular form of organic gardening, biodynamics, requiring the best obtainable soils, and will be designed specifically to increase the overall yield while at the same time reducing the drudgery of too much stooping, without sacrificing any of the essential nutritional value of anything grown there. In this way, the overall design can be celebrated by all partners as a major contribution to community, dedicated to beneficial health & nutritional value.

With these pieces in place, South Lake Tahoe can consider itself on a measured path of taking charge of a considerable aspect of their own health and well-being, while being able to offer to the outside world a commitment that no other community has – it's the best that money can buy, readily

available to all most of the time.

To find out more, visit the work-in-progress website, or contact Garry Bowen at either [tahoefuture@gmail.com](mailto:tahoefuture@gmail.com) or at (775) 690.6900.

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