

## LIBERTY



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
The anniversary the dedication Yankton's liberty garden will be today (Saturday). The garden was dedicated on Sept. 11, 2002.

## KEEP YANKTON BEAUTIFUL

## Anniversary Of Garden's Dedication Today

BY PAM FRICK

Keep Yankton Beautiful

Sept. 11, 2001, changed the history of our country. Keep Yankton Beautiful had been in operation since the fall of 2000, and there were only a small band of us trying to figure out how this whole idea was going to take shape.

Just weeks after the tragic events of 9/11, Keep America Beautiful began urging communities around the nation to install liberty gardens as a "special place of natural beauty," to "honor those that perished and reaffirm principles of freedom and liberty on which our country has been built."

It didn't take long for us to get into action. With the help of Stan Hoffart, our then-city horticulturist, and our small group, we put together a beautiful garden. Our garden was dug and planted by our new fledgling board. Businesses in town donated whatever we needed, and the city let us do it right in the mid-

dle of one of the busiest streets in town — the intersection of 4th and Douglas.

On Sept. 11, 2002, Yankton's liberty garden was dedicated with Gov. William Janklow, local officials including Mayor Charlie Gross and representatives of law enforcement and emergency services present.

Stan explained the flowers he chose for the liberty garden: The red rose is our national flower and was chosen for its name, "Hope for Humanity." Jay Gurney donated all the red roses. A burr oak was planted because it is the national tree and is native to our area.

The flag stands in an engraved piece of stonework, donated by Lukens Monuments, and remains flying at all times.

KYB is a non-profit organization and only stays alive with your donations.

Visit our Web site at [www.KeepYanktonBeautiful.org](http://www.KeepYanktonBeautiful.org) or mail a contribution to KYB at 324 Walnut in Yankton.

# HOMEGARDEN

## Garden Therapeutic For Wheelchair-Bound

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Sandy Abilovitz found renewed strength in home-grown vegetables.

Although he can't get down in the dirt and dig, Abilovitz created a garden this summer in his Sacramento, Calif., backyard with the help of his caregiver, Nathan Demesse.

"This project gives me a purpose," Abilovitz said, "and most importantly, I get to eat the fresh vegetables and fruit."

Demesse said: "He designed it, did all the planning. I just followed his direction, and it turned out amazing. I had never done anything like this before, but this is so exciting, and so fulfilling."

They make unlikely gardening partners. Abilovitz, 77, had done little backyard farming since his youth in Israel. Demesse, 28, emigrated to Sacramento as a child with his family, political exiles from Ethiopia.

Both agree: Sacramento weather feels a lot like home.

"The growing climate here is very much like Israel," Abilovitz said.

The garden was the suggestion of Abilovitz's son, Aaron. Behind a shed next to the air conditioning unit, a forgotten triangle — long ago covered by lava rock — became fertile ground for three 4-by-10-foot raised beds.

Less than four months later, the modest vegetable garden boasts a bounty of tomatoes, corn, peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, strawberries, yellow beans and peas. Huge cantaloupes ripen on a wooden trellis.

Fed a diet of steer manure, the heirloom tomato vines now tower more than 8 feet on improvised cages built of 6-inch steel mesh.

The biggest — the aptly named Goliath — weigh more than a pound apiece.

"The secret to their success — underground irrigation," Abilovitz said. "I put soaker hoses two to three inches under the ground. The water goes directly to the roots."

Always a doer, Abilovitz is a retired mechanical engineer with a degree from University of California-Berkeley. College is what brought



LEZLIE STERLING/SACRAMENTO BEE/MCT  
Sandy Abilovitz, confined to a wheelchair in his 70's, has rediscovered the joy of growing vegetables in his Sacramento, California backyard with the help of his caretaker, Nathan Demesse. Abilovitz grew up as a farmer in Israel.

him to California. He moved to Sacramento to work on the state aqueduct project. Later in Antelope, Calif., he ran a successful wrecking yard, specialized in foreign cars. His hobby was restoring vintage convertibles, including a 1954 MG TD and a 1968 Jaguar XKE.

But a fall in his garage last year caused brain trauma. Abilovitz lost the use of his legs.

"It was a real crisis we've been going through," said Sharon Abilovitz, his wife of 49 years. "I think it's wonderful that he's gardening. He needs something to keep him occupied."

Horticultural therapy is a relatively new idea with ancient roots.

"While treatment and rehabilitation have typically been offered in health-care facilities, many have found that a garden offers a complimentary health-care setting that

helps to restore physical and mental health to those who work the soil and watch seeds grow," wrote Sharon Simson and Martha C. Straus, editors of "Horticulture as Therapy" (Taylor and Francis, 2005), a comprehensive study of how plants can help make people feel better.

Simson and Straus recommended gardening as particularly helpful for persons who had suffered traumatic brain injury. Other therapists use gardening as a constructive outlet for Alzheimer's or dementia patients — and a great stress reliever for their caregivers. Gardening slowed patients' mental and physical decline and kept them active.

Connecting with plants can ease depression, says the American Horticultural Therapy Association ([ahta.org](http://ahta.org)). This professional group has seen an

increase in interest in gardening therapy. The reason is simple: Gardening makes you feel better.

For potential gardeners with disabilities, the AHTA suggests: modifying garden areas to include wide, gently graded wheelchair-accessible entrances and paths; using raised beds and containers; adapting tools (for example, long-handled trowels that can be used from a wheelchair); and using plants that stimulate the senses with fragrance, texture and color.

Garden partners from different generations — such as Abilovitz and Demesse — get another potential bonus. In the book "Blue Zones," Dan Buettner found that many of the longest-lived people in the world socialize regularly with people of other generations or live in multigenerational households.

# The Eco-Home That Julia Russell Built

BY MARY MACVEAN

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LOS ANGELES — Julia Russell has had the great fortune to live out her passion: treading ever more lightly on the planet, making her home a laboratory and herself an example.

For 22 years, she opened her Eco-Home to anyone interested in seeing what she's done at her 99-year-old Los Feliz, Calif., bungalow: solar panels, composting, a front yard she waters maybe twice a year and that looks like a little woodland clearing, a backyard overgrown with edible plants.

Hundreds of tours later, the idea of greening one's home and yard is nearing mainstream, and this summer Russell retired. She jokes that she'll no longer need to be such a conscientious housekeeper, always aware that guests would be arriving.

"I definitely made a contribution to a movement that is affecting cultural change. That is what I dreamed," she said one recent afternoon, sitting on her front porch with a mug of peppermint green tea. "I thought maybe it was a little beyond what was possible. But it's happening."

Russell and a group of Eco-Home supporters published their first newsletter in 1985. The last was published in June, the month of the last scheduled tour. The Eco-Home Network, a nonprofit organization, will go on.

The network intends to move to educating contractors and other professionals in making homes more energy efficient, to create a lending library of diagnostic equipment and to teach a "whole house" approach, said Judy Rachel, president of the network board and principal ("chief energy sleuth," as she puts it) of Green Archers Sustainable Solutions, a North Hollywood, Calif., firm whose services include home energy audits.

The landscape has changed considerably since Russell set out on a path that many people saw as eccentric, or worse. Composting classes are easy to find, lawns are being replaced all over L.A. and terms such as "low flow" and "compact fluorescents" are common.

"Eco-Home was the first in the country where a living, breathing human being began to retrofit an old home and open it up as a public demonstration for living differently. She was really the pioneer," said Lois Arkin, who in 1993 founded Eco-Village, a community in L.A.'s Koreatown that's focused on living sustainably.

"Julia ran herself out of existence, because a lot of the ideas



FRANCINE ORR/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT  
Julia Russell, center, opens her eco-friendly home in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, to the public for tours twice a month.

she proposed have become commonplace," said Jane Collings, the senior editor of a series of oral histories that make up "Environmental Activism in Los Angeles" at the UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research. The series includes Arkin and Russell.

"When she got started, these were political positions. To not water your lawn was a political position, just as when people didn't eat meat. You were taking a stand."

While Russell lobbied for a city recycling program and fought a South L.A. incinerator, among other things, she also decided it was critical that her work be her home.

"I had to embody what I wanted to convey because that's the only place from which you can have moral authority," she said.

Added Collings: "She wants her entire life to be consistent in every way."

And that, Arkin said, made her all the more inspiring.

"When people would experience that sense of wonder she had

around the compost or growing her vegetables, they would want to do that too. It felt so good," Arkin said.

Russell, 74, has silver hair that is simply but elegantly styled, and she speaks in the slow, clear cadence of someone who has explained her life and her decisions countless times. Her clothing suggests a bit of earth mother: blue cotton turtleneck under a flowered jumper and black cardigan; sturdy shoes and socks.

An East Coast native, Russell felt she'd landed in paradise when she arrived, at age 30, in Los Angeles with her husband, who had been hired to write for "The Monkees" television show. Their divorce was in some ways a midwife to Eco-Home, and Russell credits her former husband as its father because he gave her the financial support to find and follow her course in life.

Around the time that Russell and her two sons moved into the house that became Eco-Home, Russell started learning about the environment, particularly about

where L.A. got its water and how much of it went to lawns.

At the time, Russell was a beginner and not all that interested in gardening. ("I grew up with a Victorian garden. That was not an experience to inspire me to garden," she said. "I had to weed it.")

But she took a class in native plants and looked at abandoned lots to see what was growing without attention. She subscribed to Mother Earth News and Organic Gardening. She joined the National Resources Defense Council. She concluded that most of "our environmental problems stem from our modern urban lifestyle."

The late 1980s brought the Exxon Valdez oil spill, reports of medical wastes washing up on beaches and a barge full of garbage that left New York but couldn't find a dumping spot. All of those contributed to Russell's determination — and inspired other people.

"Our activities threaten the life of all life on Earth. That was pretty motivating," she said.

"Sustainable" has become ubiquitous enough that its meaning can be obscured. But Russell knew what she meant, even if she didn't realize all it would take, and certainly not all that it would lead to.

Her sons also were not always keen on their mom's behavior. Russell said that they'd ask: "Mom, why do you have to be so weird?"

But she doesn't doubt that she did the right thing. Her house didn't make her wealthy; it did make her life rich, she said. "I was finding that I was benefiting myself so

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