

Kavanah Garden sets down roots at Lebovic

Susan Minuk Special to The CJN, Tuesday, May 28, 2013



TORONTO — Shores's Kavanah Garden has moved to a permanent location on UJA Federation of Greater Toronto's Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Jewish Community Campus.

The garden opened in 2009, in partnership with UJA Federation, in a temporary location, on the Lebovic Campus in Vaughan, Ont. It has now moved 150 feet east of its original site.

The move took three weeks. Volunteers "picked up the existing garden and infrastructure and walked it down the street to our new and permanent location," said Risa Alyson Cooper, executive director of the Shores Jewish Environmental Programs.

"We disassembled and moved over our shed, rain barrels, composters and all our programming materials. We dug up all our perennials and potted them and walked them over to the new site. We shlepped it all by hand and feet."

The grand opening of the garden takes place June 9 at 1 p.m. with a festival to welcome everyone to its new home.

“With the program’s incredible success, UJA was committed to making sure that we had a permanent space on the Lebovic Campus. We were awarded funding through the Sixth Point Jewish Venture Philanthropy Fund, which was organized through the UJA,” said Cooper.

The Kavanah Garden is an organic, educational community garden whose mission is to engage the public in tikkun olam, repairing the world, by offering programs and activities rooted in Jewish ecological and agricultural beliefs.

Since 2002, Shores has been a leader in the Jewish environmental movement in the Greater Toronto Area, bringing together a community of individuals who see environmental ethics as a core element of their Jewish identity.

“The Kavanah Garden was part of a pilot initiative through UJA to support social entrepreneurship in our community. Risa Alyson Cooper brought something new and different to Toronto and has enriched our community. The garden is a culmination of that,” said Robin Gofine, vice-president of strategic planning at UJA Federation.

The Kavanah Garden was created in response to several needs in Toronto’s diverse Jewish community, including Jewish engagement, community building and hunger relief, Cooper said.

“In Jewish text and teachings, there is a strong basis for an environmental ethic, that everyone has a responsibility to be stewards of creation. There is much in our tradition that we can draw from. How do we create sustainable food systems? How do we make choices that value environmental sustainability? How can we use a Jewish lens to help us make these choices? Jewish text and teachings are woven in to all of the different programs that we run,” explained Cooper.

The Kavanah Garden features more than 100 varieties of organic vegetables, herbs, fruits and wildflowers; a compost demonstration site; a rainwater catchment system; a Havdalah spice garden; raised wheelchair-accessible garden beds; a greenhouse, outdoor kitchen and bicycle-powered blender; a guided nature trail; educational signs in Hebrew, English and, most recently added, Russian.

Eighty per cent of the food grown at the Kavanah Garden is donated to community members in need through its tzedakah partner, Ve’ahavta: The Canadian Jewish Humanitarian Relief Committee.

The Kavanah Garden hosts 1,500 community members annually through its educational and hands-on programs, workshops and events, producing over 500 pounds of fresh vegetables each season for community members in need.

It facilitates workshops and activities at schools and shuls across the GTA, hosts an annual Jewish Food Conference at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community

Centre, co-ordinates a network of Jewish community support agriculture programs, and is developing a rural centre for sustainable land-based Judaism at Bela Farms in Hillsburgh, Ont.

“The Kavanah Garden is not affiliated with a particular denomination. On any given afternoon we will have Orthodox families, secular families, Israelis, Russians and non-Jewish community members. Now that we have a permanent space, we will be able to cultivate and invest for years to come by planting fruit and nut trees, berry bushes, perennials, native wildflowers to attract natural pollinators to our space,” Cooper said.

The garden’s opening festivities include entertainment by local klezmer musicians, activities for people of all ages such as planting, arts and crafts and tours of the garden.

“Instead of having a ribbon-cutting ceremony, we are going to affix a mezuzah to our gateway as the marking that we are now animating the space and coming home,” Cooper said.

For more information, go to www.shoresh.ca.