

## Blueberries

What do you do with a couple of empty urban lots after the homes that were there are declared uninhabitable and are demolished? You turn them into a blueberry orchard, of course!

All you have to do is:

1. Purchase the properties from the Albany County Land Bank.
2. Clean up the remaining construction debris, cut down the dead and dying trees and remove the excess and invasive vegetation.
3. Cover the land with wood chips and smooth it out, and then cover the chips with a layer of wood mulch and smooth it out. This is easier with the proper machinery, but it can be done with rakes, strong backs and hopefully, many volunteers.
4. Find 240 cubic yards of sandy loam to spread over the whole thing to a depth of one foot. Smooth it out (see #3) and treat it for the proper acidity.
5. Purchase 200 blueberry bushes of the right age and species to ensure hardiness and long life.
6. Gather a few dozen volunteers to plant the bushes.



A Facebook ad looking for volunteers



Lions Greg Sheldon & Jerry Gordon in the food tent that was set up for the volunteer planters

**Lion Greg Sheldon** has accomplished all that and the planting was done on September 25, 2019. This project never could have been completed without Greg, but he didn't do it alone. Our deepest gratitude goes to Mayor Kathy Sheehan and the City of Albany for its immeasurable support with equipment and materials; Albany County Land Bank; LCIF for their initial and follow-up funding; Anthem (BC/BS) for supplying 30 volunteers to do the planting; One World Center for the international volunteers who raked; Cornell Cooperative Extension for their technical expertise; the Albany boxing gym and the summer youth employment program, both of whom supplied many strong young

backs; R.J. Valente Construction, who supplied the sandy loam; Callanan/Fane Industries, for transporting the loam; Albany FD Engine Seven, who did the initial watering; and, of course, the Albany & Troy Lions Club for their sponsorship of this project and their financial and moral support.

Some background: For the past several years, Lions Clubs International (LCI) and Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) have been partnering with the Anthem Foundation (the largest Blue Cross/Blue Shield provider) to sponsor "Lions/Anthem Volunteer Days." The goal is to

mobilize Anthem volunteers from around the country in service projects with Lions that address community health & wellness needs. The past two years, this resulted in work days at the Regional Food Bank.

In May, Lions Clubs were offered the opportunity to come up with a proposal and apply for a \$1500 grant. Lion Greg Sheldon submitted our

application to purchase and plant 150 blueberry bushes on two lots in Albany that are part of a multi-lot parcel he already owns and manages as Albany Victory Gardens. (When it came time to buy the bushes, we were able to get 200 for just a little more money.) Anthem volunteers



Lion Grea and the Anthem volunteer planters



And in the middle of all this, on Saturday, Sept 21, Lions Jodi and Greg got married! Our most joyous congratulations to them both, along with our wishes for a long and happy life together.

and Lions will do the planting. Greg will oversee the ongoing maintenance and harvesting with kids from the neighborhood. Needless to say, we got the grant!

Why blueberries? Blueberries are an attractant for pollinators, which will increase agricultural yield in other nearby areas; they're full of nutrients and anti-oxidants and will be an excellent food source that is generally unavailable in the West Hill neighborhood. The blueberries can grow for more than 30 years and this means kids that plant with us may someday share them with their children. This generational buy-in to community health equity, food sovereignty

and social justice changes the narrative and grows community. In addition, we developed soil that will absorb water and reduce the burden of storm water runoff by over 100,000 gallons. This soil will also purify the air, sequester carbon and provide an agriculturally viable landscape for the blueberry orchard!



The West Hill Community Blueberry Orchard!