

## SUMMER FOOD

# Spring Brings Fresh Produce to Arlington Needy

Spring vegetables most needed right now include beets, lettuce, spinach, collards, kale, carrots and radishes.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Gardeners gear up for another season of donating produce to support local food pantries. Arlington Friends of Urban Agriculture (FOUA) is supporting the opening of a bagging site at Rock Spring UCC located at 5020 Little Falls Road. Spring vegetables most needed currently include beets, lettuce, spinach, collards, kale, carrots and radishes.

Volunteers sign up for bagging slots Mondays, May-June 1-3 p.m. and Mondays and Thursdays July-October 1-3 p.m. in Carpenter Hall where the local produce is delivered. A short training video is required as well as answering some food safety questions. Last year Rock Spring packaged and delivered 6,826 pounds of fresh

produce over the growing season. COVID safety procedures are in place requiring masks, hairnets or hats and social distancing.

In addition to these efforts, produce is accepted on a regular rotating schedule at local food pantries including ALIVE, YMCA, Guest House and Mother of Light Center in Alexandria; Arlington Food Assistance Center, St. Charles Borromeo and Community Church of God in Arlington; New Hope Housing and Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center in Falls Church; and SHARE of McLean.

This Plot Against Hunger program is a collaborative effort managed by Friends of Urban Agriculture. In addition to the efforts of local gardeners, it includes Arlington Virginia Cooperative Extension, Marymount University, Master Gardeners, Master Food Volunteers and food pantries.



PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE

Carter Berry assists Susan Agolini dropping off produce from Marymount University's Plot Against Hunger Garden on Monday, May 24. Volunteers at Rock Spring UCC will bag the produce.

Eight-year-old Dagny Viera writes "lettuce" and "lechuga" on each plastic bag as her mother, Stacey, a Master Food Volunteer, prepares lettuce for a family of four.

## Burdette Goal: A Microgreen in Every Fridge



Diego Gomez, home from UVA for the summer, is helping staff his mom's Roots & Shoots microgreens stand at Lubber Run Farmer's Market on Saturdays from 8 a.m.-noon.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
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Paula Burdette won't stop talking about microgreens "until they are in everyone's fridge in the Washington metropolitan area" because of their nutritional value. Burdette started growing microgreens for her family during the pandemic last September after a friend gave her the idea. "I had to have a shelf and it just kept growing and growing. It was delicious and fun."

In January she turned it into a business. Now Burdette grows 20

different varieties in 30 trays of vertical shelving. She explains microgreens are vegetable seedlings that provide exceptional flavor, nutrition and texture for salads, sandwiches, soups. "Microgreens are good for you, and these are locally grown making for a globally conscious choice."

When her job in special education administration dried up completely during the pandemic, she started interviewing for other jobs. "I had done lots of face-to-face consultation and evaluation in the schools which were now closed." She said she found herself saying,



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Paula Burdette grows 20 different varieties of microgreens in 30 trays of vertical shelving in her Arlington Roots & Shoots business.

"I hope I don't get this job, but I loved being with my greens all the time."

"It just takes a little sunlight, water, soil." Burdette grew up in Oklahoma where "the ground didn't give up anything. In contrast, it's so easy here." She says you just put a lot of seeds in the soil. Most greens like broccoli take 7-10 days to grow but some others like fennel take 20 days. Burdette says she started out with the easiest like radishes and then branched out to what she wanted like nasturtium. Then she added customer requests like borage. "It

tastes like cucumber."

Her favorite is Purple Vienna Kohlrabi, "but I'm really excited about the Red Garnet Amaranth. It's red, gorgeous. Now I have red and green and can do something for Christmas." She says her customer favorite is pea shoots. Burdette provides recipes that use the distinctive sweet and spicy flavors of each microgreen. Her favorite recipe came from the meat farmer at Crystal City for lemon chicken with capers and nasturtium garnish.

Part of her microgreen mission is centered on kids. She has taught

kids' classes on how to grow microgreens and which parts of the plant are edible. She hopes to get back into the schools again when they reopen.

Burdette is also involved in donating microgreens weekly to local food pantries, which serve families with food insecurity at Arlington Food Assistance Center and Our Lady Queen of Peace Church. She says the scarce dollars of low-income families are often stretched on foods without high nutritional value. Burdette adds that research shows microgreens have four to six times more nutrients than mature plants.

Currently Burdette sells her microgreens at Lubber Run and Del Ray Farmers markets on Saturday, Columbia Pike on Sunday, Crystal City on Tuesday and Rosslyn on Wednesday. She also offers microgreen subscriptions with free delivery on orders of \$20 and up. Containers come in single serving, double dose, triple treat or family feast.

She is hoping to team up with another local farmer to provide a package, like a salad share where you get what you want and include microgreens. "I want it to be hyper local, like Arlington, green, sustainable."

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## NEWS

# The Year That Was

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

**N**March 2020 COVID suddenly brought about the closing of schools where children had regularly received free breakfast and lunches. Businesses slowed down or closed temporarily across the area, and workers were furloughed for an indefinite period of time.

On March 14, 2020, Arlington County declared a local emergency in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The past year challenged Arlington like never before, with more than 200 Arlingtonians dying of covid, and 13,655 total cases. But 2020 showed the strength and resiliency of the community. Now with vaccines, we might see the light at the end of the tunnel.

But the pain and challenge of covid is not over.

As families struggled for food, Arlingtonians stepped in to provide meals for their neighbors. Beginning March 16 a year ago, Arlington Public Schools began providing grab-and-go breakfasts and lunches outside two elementary schools. This list was later expanded as it became clear schools would not be reopening for in-person classes for the remainder of the school year.

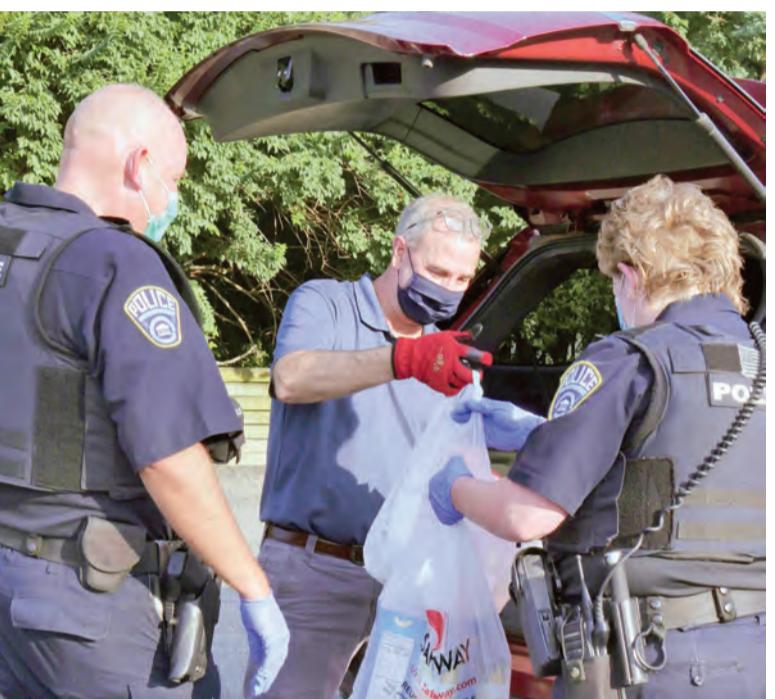
Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) issued a plea for food donations for their supplemental food assistance program as donations plunged and need skyrocketed. To stay healthy, they eliminated the choice model, bought more pre-packaged foods and ended chicken prepackaging.

Just like a field of flowers, food

collection bins were scattered across yards. Local businesses, neighborhoods and churches sponsored food drives, and children gave away free balloons in their yard in exchange for a can of food left on their porch. Referrals to AFAC increased 25 percent during COVID.

Arlington County organized the Co-operative for Hunger Free Arlington (CHFA) to address the needs of everyone in Arlington. CHFA is a set of informal relationships between the county, APS, AFAC and groups such as PTAs, faith-based food pantries, restaurants offering food to the needy and an expanded Meals on Wheels. Diane Kresh, Co-chair, says, "By connecting the various players we can identify gaps to make sure we're not overlooking a neighborhood."

Children stop by Kenmore Elementary to pick up grab and go meals as feeding sites open outside schools to provide meals for school kids after schools close due to COVID.



Arlington County Police Department sponsors "Fill the Cruiser" with food supplies in August and collects 6,509 pounds for the day.



Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) provides 2,500 turkeys to low-income families at Thanksgiving.



Parents with assistance of Kenmore PTA organize a monthly food distribution serving 75 families in April and expecting over 100 in May.



A-SPAN organizes a cereal drive for homeless at the Homeless Services Center.



A second grader puts her sack of canned soup and tuna in the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) box at Langston Community Center on Saturday, February 27. AFAC partnered with Arlington Parks and Recreation to help feed neighbors in need by setting up donation boxes outside twelve community centers the weekend of February 27-28.

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Feeding the multitudes during COVID — one can at a time.



Community volunteers bags fresh produce for families in need. Donated produce from gardens all across the County was packaged and delivered totaling 6,825 pounds during the June 1-October 29 growing season.



Community gardens located on S. Four Mile Run share their produce with needy families.



On Martin Luther King Day, volunteers serve chicken biryani and pass out relief packages to Muslim men filing out of the mosque at the Bangladesh Islamic Center on S. Nelson.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SIMONEINK



Amazon partners with Freddie's Beach Bar & Restaurant to provide 10,000 meals in May to employees of Arlington Hospital Center, firemen and neighbors in low-income housing.



AFAC truck is a well-recognized symbol of the supplemental food assistance program serving over 2,800 as the needs grow during the pandemic.



Josh Babb runs 437 laps in 5-mile-marathon around neighborhood cul de sac in May to raise funds for restocking his church food pantry.



Eagle Scout, Charlie Gaylord, builds a pantry for AFAC food collection behind the Central Library in November.



Girl Scout cookie sales go virtual this year as Erin Parks sells 394 boxes.

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# The Arlington Connection

## Feeding The Hungry For Holidays

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Randy Randall, an AFAC volunteer of 13 years, pushes a cart loaded high with fresh produce, which will provide plentiful choices for Thanksgiving at AFAC Nov. 15.



### Innie or Outie?

TRASH CANS, PAGE 4

### Private School Admissions

OH MY PAGE 5

PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 6,7,8 ♦ CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 10

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# NEWS

# Turkey Time Rolls Around at AFAC

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
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**R**ay Bynum remembers it was 7:09 a.m. when he started unloading the Sisco truck full of 2,600 frozen turkeys in front of the Arlington Food Assistance (AFAC) building on S. Nelson Street. The turkeys had been delivered on Friday morning, Nov. 12 and were waiting in a refrigerated truck for the AFAC Thanksgiving turkey distribution on Nov. 15.

The distribution had been scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m. but people started lining up at 7 a.m. The line extended down the block — wheelchair clients, families with small children and everyone with a shopping bag, even a suitcase.

Jeremiah Huston, associate director of communications, says, "I don't know why but people always do that, even for the regular weekly food distribution. It's as if they are afraid we will run out." Huston says the line will slow to a trickle, and then there will be a rush at the end.

Jolie Smith, AFAC director of development, says they had to order the turkeys and the chicken roasters for the residents at the senior living facilities in the middle of the summer. She says, "They are more expensive then but we had to be sure we could get enough for all of the AFAC clients." She says for the last couple of years Sisco has made things a lot easier for them by donating a refrigerated truck and preloading it with the turkeys, which has eliminated a lot of the

logistics.

Clients head inside the building and walk through the line where they can choose their regular milk, eggs, canned goods, bread.

"But," Smith says, "this week we have 70 cases of fresh green beans as well as fresh sweet potatoes donated by South Block, who also sends us apples during the year for the kids."

Randy Randall, who says he has been volunteering with AFAC for 13 years, moves a dolly stacked high with fresh kale, radishes, fennel and zucchini through the building. The fresh veggies have been gleaned from local farmers markets.

The last stop for the clients is the canopied turkey table outside which is manned by Marga Robillard. Cases of turkeys are stacked behind her against the wall waiting to be taken home. Each client receives a 12-pound turkey and a case of Fever Tree ginger beer. The word "beer" alarms a number of clients even though Robillard explains it is non-alcoholic.

AFAC volunteers stand ready to help clients carry the turkeys down the street to their parked cars. Parking is especially difficult today, and the load is heavy this week, especially for clients who have struggled just to get there.

AFAC is an incorporated 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to providing supplemental groceries to Arlington residents who cannot afford to purchase enough food to meet their basic needs. AFAC distributes over 80,000 pounds of food to families



AFAC clients line up early for turkey distribution on Monday, Nov. 15.



Randy Randall, an AFAC volunteer of 13 years, pushes a cart loaded high with fresh produce, which will provide plentiful choices for Thanksgiving at AFAC Nov. 15.

in need each week.

Charles Meng, AFAC chief executive officer, says during COVID the need for supplemental groceries increased with 2,334 fam-

ilies requesting assistance, many for the first time due to economic hardship. AFAC operates under the Choice Model, which allows families to select the foods they are

more likely to eat and know how to prepare. AFAC currently operates 17 distribution sites at various locations around Arlington. For more information: [www.afac.org](http://www.afac.org)



AFAC development director Jolie Smith and warehouse manager Raymond Bynum give an enthusiastic high five at the halfway unloading point for 2,600 turkeys.



AFAC development director Jolie Smith and warehouse manager Raymond Bynum inspect turkeys way in the back of the oversized Sisco semi trailer that earlier in the morning had held 2,600 frozen turkeys.



Marga Robillard mans the turkey distribution table outside the AFAC warehouse on Monday. She had been working inside the warehouse packing and sorting produce since 7:20 a.m.



Danielle Rampton, an AFAC staff member, chases a runaway turkey that catapulted out of a client's arms that were overloaded with groceries.