

# Dimensions of Living

The Smithtown News • June 20, 2019

## Digging it!

New gardening program at Whisper Woods combines horticulture with physical therapy

**E**ldergrow is taking root at Whisper Woods in Smithtown.

Eldergrow educator and master gardener Lauren Ferris, of Greenlawn, a horticultural therapist certified through the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, began a gardening program last week at Whisper Woods, Smithtown's newest assisted living facility. After outlining the program for the residents, Ms. Ferris invited them up to plant herbs and flowers in a mobile garden. She will return to Whisper Woods every other week, and in the interim the residents will tend to the garden they planted last week.

"It is a therapeutic gardening program," said Whisper Woods Memory Care Director Malin Thaxter. "A majority of the residents loved gardening and used to be outside working in their yards a lot and this will give them an ability to continue to enjoy that activity in the same way."

During an interview while she helped the residents take their plants out of pots and get them into the previously prepared soil at Whisper Woods June 11, Ms. Ferris said studies have shown that gardening is therapeutic for people who are elderly and infirm. She cited as a favorite example the 1984 Room with a View study by Dr. Roger Ulrich.

At a Pennsylvania Hospital from 1972 to 1981, Dr. Ulrich observed two separate groups of patients who had gallbladder surgery, one group with a view of nature and foliage outside their hospital window and the other group with no view. "What they found is that the ones with the view required less medication, asked for the nurse less often, and were released a day earlier than the patients without a view of nature," Ms. Ferris said. "That study was really revolutionary for horticultural therapy."

Ms. Ferris said Whisper Woods patients will tend to the garden every day and when she visits every other week they will have classes on a wide variety of horticultural topics. She will also bring in a new plant every class to add to the garden.

"It provides cognitive development,

socialization and other therapeutic activities to get them stimulated through horticulture," Ms. Ferris said.

As the program develops, Ms. Ferris said her classes will cover propagation of plants, cultivating herbs, garden art, cooking with the herbs they have grown and a botany class. "So every other week there will be a class and then we will plant and tend to the garden," she said. "It's fantastic. They love it."

As she helped the residents of Whisper Woods with their planting last week and listened to them share gardening stories, Ms. Ferris said plants have a natural way of bringing back memories in people because of their scents. "They get a good smell of the basil and say, 'oh, I remember when my mom used to plant basil in our yard.' It's fantastic to experience."



Whisper Woods residents get some gardening pointers from Eldergrow educator and master gardener Lauren Ferris as part of a new gardening program at the Smithtown senior living facility

