

Girl Scouts Dig Gardening At The Farm

BY DEBBIE DE LOUISE

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Some wear gardening gloves, others old T-shirts and worn shorts. They are prepared to get dirty and have fun while learning about plants and helping others. They are the Girl Scout gardeners who participate in the Girl Scouts of Nassau County's gardening program at the Farm at Oyster Bay.

According to Amanda Roberts, Town of Oyster Bay Caretaker, the Girl Scout gardeners program is 5 years old. Each Girl Scout troop that registers for the program selects three weeks to work at the farm from the beginning of the planting season in the spring through the fall harvest, and the girls also participate in special monthly events such as Arbor Day, Dig it Day and Weedathon. This year, 15 troops of about 100 girls were registered in the program.

Besides learning to sow seeds, weed, do pest control, harvest, and collect seeds for next year's crop in an organically run garden, the girls earn a gardening badge for participating. The produce collected at the farm is donated to local food banks.

Debbie Barberi, leader of Hicksville's Cadet Troop 3307, said, "I think the gardener program is a wonderful opportunity for the girls to understand and experience the work involved with farming. Their hard work is that much more impactful because they know that they are helping to provide



Troop #3307 scouts smile after a day of gardening.
(Photo by Debbie Barberi)

fresh produce to people that might not be able to afford it otherwise."

Julie Busch, a Scout with Troop 3307 said, "I have loved going to the Oyster Bay Farm with my family and friends this summer. I have learned so much about planting vegetables and taking care of our Earth."

Fellow Scouts Katie Barberi and Sarah Sheehan added, "We wanted to participate because we want to learn how to plant, grow and harvest crops. It is fun, interesting and keeps us busy during the summer. It's awesome that all the harvested food goes to the food pantry."

Another important element to the gardeners program are the high school girls, known as Under Gardeners, who earn community service and a badge for helping Roberts and the younger girls in the program. Patte Conway, program specialist at GSNC, helped develop the program by approaching Roberts about using the Farm. Conway came up with the concept of under gardeners like those used in Europe.

"They (the Under Gardeners) run all the functions as well as assist me in the garden," Roberts said. "Most are individual scouts and do this on their own without their troop."

Local Helps Others Dance Their Way To Health

BY CHRISTA SPERANZA

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Even with many years of rigorous training, dancers can still struggle their whole lives to attain recognition. However, with dedication and perseverance, a performer can make their way to the spotlight. For Ellen Coven, to stop dancing once she grew older was never an option. After 40 years of performing and teaching, as well as writing a book, Coven shows no sign of retiring from her lifelong career of dance.

Her passion began at a young age and followed her through college, all the way through graduating in 1967 from Queens College with a degree in physical education, and later obtaining a master's in theatrical performance from what was then known as C.W. Post University. While she began her career by teaching physical education at a local public school, she later started teaching her own dance classes in the late '60s.

"They were dance exercise classes or dancercise. Eventually, I took those classes to my local library in Jericho," Coven explained. She found that after a while, as her students grew older, she had to modify her classes for them as well. "I went to Jericho in '74 and by the early '80s, I had modified my classes to model 'seniorobics'."



Ellen Coven (sixth from left) with students in her library fitness class.

Coven knew her students would not be able to handle the intense dance moves they once could, so she crafted a fun, body-friendly method of dance to keep her students, and herself, entertained.

"It's a combination of music and styles from the '50s, '60s and '70s," Coven said, "I also incorporated Latin, swing and Broadway music; it's those types of dance combined with strength, flexibility and fun. And the seniors really have a lot of fun, as do I."

Coven has taught classes in seven libraries—Hicksville, Bethpage, North Bellmore, Jericho, Syosset, Plainview and Wantagh. Coven's dance career extended well beyond the local libraries as she keeps herself busy

with other ventures as well.

She previously did a series of fitness videos for Cablevision on their Extra Help channel, and was also a regular presenter at National Association for Fitness Professionals conventions. She also has conducted various nationwide instructional workshops and is a published author, writing her own book, *Seniorobics*, and acting as a contributing author for *Rehab & Sports Medicine for Women*.

But for Coven, the dedication and attentiveness that her students displayed in her classes have really motivated her throughout her career. One particular student stood out to her above the rest.

"I had one student, Dorothy, who

came to me in the late '70s, and told me how she wanted to work out and do personal training with me," Coven said. "She went to my classes, and she's still working out to this day. She's 96 and still lifting weights. Dorothy was an amazing student."

While Coven will soon no longer be teaching her classes at Long Island libraries, she hopes to continue her career in her new home of Delaware.

"I intend to teach there, just not as much as I did here," she said.

Surely, the students will miss their teacher, but Coven has left her students with more than a few cool dance moves. Coven is leaving behind a legacy of dance and determination, integrated with fun.