

## A seed library takes hold in Depauville with hopes for growth

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**DEPAUVILLE** — The director of the library here likes to quote the Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero to note the significance of a project begun at the facility this year.

“If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need,” Cicero said.

“We are one-stop shopping for both,” said Karen Nadder-Lago, director of the Depauville Free Library, 32333 County Route 179.

The library has cultivated a “seed library,” which Ms. Nadder-Lago said is the only one in the region.

The library lends seeds just as it does books, but with loan periods as long as the growing season.

A seed library is dedicated to getting seeds to as many gardeners as possible to be grown each year, preserving the varieties. Ms. Nadder-Lago said it is a way to inspire people to grow some of their own food and to develop a network of seed savers to create locally adapted varieties.

In this, the first year of the Clayton Town Seed Library program, organic heirloom vegetable, herb and flower seeds were purchased to start gardeners off. Heirloom, or heritage varieties, are open pollinated, which results in new generations of those plants. This could lead to more diverse genetic traits, as opposed to plants that are self-pollinated, which have a much less chance of differences over generations.

Ms. Nadder-Lago explained that over the last 30 years, advances in molecular biology have allowed the development of genetically modified seeds. These “transgenic” seeds are in effect sterile, she said, incapable of producing seeds for another generation of plants. This forces growers to continually purchase seeds and they lose the means of self-sufficiency formerly gained from collecting and saving seed from their own crops.

“At the end of the growing season, if they have a good crop, hopefully they will bring in the seeds,” Ms. Nadder-Lago said of the seed library users.

She said reaction to the seed library has been very positive.

“People have been coming in and getting them (seeds), but I don’t think we’ll run out,” Ms. Nadder-Lago said last week.

Some of the seeds, Ms. Nadder-Lago said, have an interesting story behind them. She wrote in a press release that black beans in the library can be traced back to Italy of the late 1930s and early 1940s. She wrote that was when Louis Constantino, a young farmer in Italy, was standing in his family’s field ready to plant the black beans that filled his pockets when Mussolini’s soldiers rounded him up and conscripted him into the Italian Army.

“His luck was not all bad, however, for almost immediately he was captured by Americans and sent to a POW camp in North Africa,” Ms. Nadder-Lago wrote. “Louis was transferred among several American-run camps in North Africa where he grew his beans until the end of the war.”

She wrote that Mr. Constantino liked how the Americans managed the camps and how he was treated and on the first available transport after the war, he and his black beans came to the United States. He settled in Cortland.

The library director said Mr. Constantino got married, raised a family and worked as a laborer until he retired. He died in 2006.

Ms. Nadder-Lago wrote that William F. Fairchild, a contractor from Adams, was hired by a neighbor of Mr. Constantino's in the mid-1990s.

"Bill and Louis became friendly and would have lunch together under Louis's grape arbor," Ms. Nadder-Lago wrote. Conversation eventually included talk of the war and Louis's beans, Ms. Nadder-Lago wrote. When the job was finished, Mr. Fairchild left Cortland with Louis's story and a container of his black beans.

Ms. Nadder-Lago said Mr. Fairchild, who declined to talk to the Times about the subject, heard about the Town of Clayton Seed Library and its interest in preserving heirloom seeds and documenting their histories and donated some of the black beans.

Mr. Constantino's black pole beans were planted by several farmers and gardeners in the town of Clayton. With good weather, Ms. Nadder-Lago wrote, they will produce beans to eat and to save, creating future plantings and "will keep the tale of Louis Constantino and his pocketful of beans alive too for seasons to come."



The seeds at the library are stored in acid-free envelopes in drawers that previously held index cards related to the Dewey Decimal System, which the library no longer uses because of advancements in technology.

"Borrowers" are given small packets with seeds. There's a limit of 10 varieties of items to grow.

"No one has requested more," Ms. Nadder-Lago said.

Gardeners, after harvesting the crops and seeds, will return some of the seeds from the new crop to the library to replenish its collection.

The collection, Ms. Nadder-Lago said, should evolve with the conditions the seeds were grown in and improve with hardiness over time.

The library has information on how to dry seeds and plans to host workshops this summer on how to dry and preserve seeds.

For more information, contact the library at [deplib@ncls.org](mailto:deplib@ncls.org) or call the library at 686-3299.