

"Federation Corner" column
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Sophia Maravell named by Civic Federation as Community Hero

by Peggy Dennis
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The Montgomery County Civic Federation regularly honors people and organizations from our community that are heroes--taking time from their lives, and working hard to make the county a better place for all of us. A list of all those who have been honored as Community Heroes from 2004 to the present is available on the group's website at www.montgomerycivic.org/communityheroes.html.

It is rare that we have a young person whose vision, passion and energy have created a new and exciting resource for the county and particularly for our children. So it was with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I nominated Sophia Maravell, the founder of the Brickyard Educational Farm in Potomac, to be honored as a Community Hero at the December 3 meeting of the Montgomery County Civic Federation.

Sophia attended Colorado College, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology, and became passionate about promoting sustainable agriculture. By her sophomore year she was co-manager of the Colorado College Student Farm. It was there that Sophia gained experience teaching preschoolers in an outdoor farm setting.

Sophia went on to earn a post-graduation certificate in animal husbandry and organic vegetable production from The Farm School in Athol, Massachusetts. The Farm School is a non-profit, working educational farm that teaches both children and adults the art of growing sustainable food, and educates them as to why organic agriculture is important for the health of our nation.

After graduating from The Farm School, and with five seasons of hands-on experience on organic farms under her belt, Sophia returned home to the family farm to enact her dream of starting an educational farm.

The idea for this agro-educational initiative grew out of a grassroots community movement to preserve the fertile, organic soil on land held in trust for educational needs. The proposal by the county government to bulldoze Nick's Organic Farm and turn the Brickyard Road school site into four privately controlled soccer fields outraged the local community. This outrage led to the creation of Brickyard Educational Farm spearheaded by Sophia Maravell with the support of hundreds of local volunteers.

During its first year, the Brickyard Educational Farm has served over 1600 children in public and private schools, homeschooling cooperatives, civic organizations and religious institutions through its on-farm programming, family farm volunteer days, and in-class presentations. It has brought a community together around healthy food, vibrant local food economies and improving environmental, outdoor and farm-based education for our children.

Sophia's vision for Brickyard Educational Farm is to simultaneously expand the farm-to-school program to serve 5400 students annually, to grow 90,000 pounds of fresh, locally grown, organic produce for school cafeterias, to continue saving rare varieties of organic, heirloom, and GMO-free seed stock (which requires sufficient geographical isolation from crops that employ Genetically Modified Organisms in order to prevent cross pollination), and to help train the next generation of young farmers. This vision would be a national model for agricultural education as it would be the only center in the country that

synthesizes organic food production, hands-on agricultural education, food security through seed saving, and young farmer incubation in one location under the same not-for-profit umbrella.

For her vision, passion and energy in creating and growing the Brickyard Education Farm and expanding its use by many different community groups and organizations, the Civic Federation is pleased to honor Sophia Maravell as a Montgomery County Community Hero.

Note: additional information on Nick's Organic Farm located in Potomac, Maryland, and the teaching program that takes place there in local and organic food and agriculture, can be found on the internet at www.brickyardeducationalfarm.org.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net