



Grover Cleveland High School

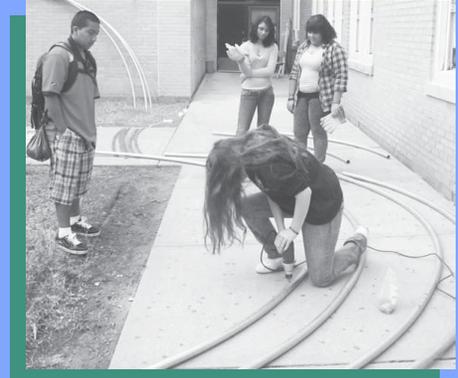
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Dominick Scarola, Principal

Good News GCHS is going Green



Teacher Russell Nitchman will often dangle onion roots and other forms of produce during his daily classes at Grover Cleveland High School. (photo: Ralph Mancini)



In addition to receiving classroom instruction, Nitchman's students have also contributed in the installation of the shell of a new on-site greenhouse at Grover Cleveland High School.

Grover Cleveland Students Get Green Thumbs At Their Garden

Produce Grown, Sold At Ridgewood School by Ralph Mancini 10/7/10 [Read Times Article Here](#)

A high school teacher's passion for plants has become infectious at Ridgewood's Grover Cleveland High School, as juniors and seniors are being introduced to all aspects of botany and horticulture through hands-on instruction.

When first tackling the task of manifesting the art of growing and nurturing plants to teens three years ago, it was Russell Nitchman's goal to spearhead a collaborative effort to plant the seeds for a new garden in the school's Metropolitan Avenue parking lot.

Since then, the small plot of land has produced tomatoes, pumpkins and various types of squash, which are sold to teachers and students to help fund Nitchman's initiative.

In addition to receiving classroom instruction, Nitchman's students have also contributed in the installation of the shell of a new on-site greenhouse at Grover Cleveland High School. (photo: Russell Nitchman) When his pupils aren't getting their hands dirty, Nitchman can often be seen breaking down the science of plant reproduction in the classroom by examining the composition of a wild onion and other types of plant life.

"A lot of kids have never been exposed to plants before. By exposing them to gardening, they may wind up having house plants or just having a love for house plants and enjoying it as a pastime," observed Nitchman, a self-described "farm boy" who was raised in New Jersey.

"I love to give back to the kids and explain why trees are important," he added. "Telling them why having streets lined with trees is important and helps bring oxygen into the air and purifies the air."

But Nitchman has recently taken his lessons one step further by explaining to his students that good planting skills can translate into a career.

During last Friday's 45-minute session, the plant expert informed his pupils about opportunities available to them to become soil testers, tree pruners, landscape engineers or even an employee of the Parks Department.

He later disclosed to the *Times Newsweekly* that his lecture was his "one shot" to make youngsters consider plant science as a career, particularly for those who may decide not to further their education after high school.

"How many kids in that class will go for a career in it or study it in college? Probably one at most. But if you do catch that one kid and you give them that spark, give them that passion for it ... to me that's a home run," said the educator, who formerly taught at John Bowne High School in Flushing. "It's not about getting rich; some of the wealthiest people in the world are the unhappiest people. It's about being able to pay your bills, being able to survive and learning how to enjoy life."

Although the students do get a chance to roll up their sleeves and stick their fingers in the dirt, Nitchman's class requires lots of reading and test taking.

While only few achieve grades of 90 or higher on his tests, Nitchman added that even someone with a 70 average can earn themselves a "B" since a student's performance in the field will also be factored into the final grade.

Currently, the plant guru is focusing on building a greenhouse at Grover Cleveland that will contain a variety of flowers and protect them from the winter winds and icy weather.

In the meantime, community members can often catch Nitchman tending to his pumpkin patch in the school parking lot. Although many of the pumpkins are still green, they'll soon be assuming their traditional orange hue just in time for Halloween.

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