

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

****O'Fallon Garden Club Receives National Award for Most Fresh Produce Donated to Food Bank****

****O'Fallon, IL – September 16, 2024**** – The O'Fallon Garden Club is proud to announce it has received the 2023 Food Bank Donation Award from the National Garden Club. This award is given to clubs that donate the largest amount of fresh produce, per capita, to a local food bank. This is the second consecutive year the O'Fallon Garden Club has received this award, which highlights the organization's overriding commitment to providing fresh, nutritious food to the community to help alleviate food insecurity.

"Since the beginning, having the vegetable garden has always been the club's plan," said Bob Winkler, chair of the O'Fallon Garden Club Community Garden. Winkler, who joined the club a year after its founding, expanded the original vegetable patch to increase its harvest. Later, he secured funding to build raised beds to safeguard the viability of crops against the negative effects of climate change. Today, he and a team of volunteers work 40 hours a week from March to November to plant, weed, water, and harvest a cornucopia of fresh produce for their neighbors.

"We have 27 things that we do," said Winkler. "We have beans, beets, blackberries, cabbage, cantaloupe, carrots, cucumbers, herbs, leafy greens, lettuce, okra, onions, peas, peppers, pumpkin, radishes, spinach, summer squash, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, watermelon, and winter squash." Last year, the club donated 5,300 pounds to the O'Fallon Community Food Pantry, and to date this year, they've donated 3,100 pounds. "From 2012 to 2024, we've donated 41,500 pounds of produce to the food pantry," said Winkler.

"Each summer, the O'Fallon Community Food Pantry is blessed with a variety of fresh vegetables and fruit that are grown by the O'Fallon Garden Club," said Larry Strube, the pantry's director. "For most of the year, the Pantry provides canned vegetables and fruit, so having a variety of fresh food in the summer has a big impact on our clients...When a client visits the Pantry, the fresh vegetables are an addition to their normal order, so not only do they receive extra food in the summer, but it's also a healthy addition to their diet. So far this summer, we have served an average of 300 families each month, so it's easy to see the impact that the O'Fallon Garden Club is making."

****O'Fallon to host the 2024 National Garden Clubs' Central Region Convention on October 17-19****

This three-day event will be held at The Regency Conference Center, located at 400 Regency Park, O'Fallon, Illinois, and it will bring visitors from across the Central Region states, as well as Lynne Ehnert, the Central Region Director, and Brenda Moore, President of the National Garden Clubs. The seven states

that constitute the Central Region include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

O'Fallon Garden Club President Sarah Lambaria will serve as the convention chairperson. She's put together an outstanding line-up that includes speakers Dr. Elizabeth Wahle from the University of Illinois Extension speaking on invasive plants, Mary Vanderford, the CEO of Heartland Conservatory, and Carrie Bergs, Vice President of the American Rose Society.

On the last day of the convention, visitors will tour the award-winning O'Fallon Garden Club State Street Community Garden to plant a native Serviceberry tree and to see where the local produce is grown. Volunteers will be on hand to answer questions related to the club's outreach efforts as well as the garden's six landscape beds, butterfly garden, herb garden, native plant garden, pollinator bed, gazebo, arbor, and the apiary, with its five beehives. Afterwards, guests can shop and enjoy the fabulous Vine Street Farmer's Market in downtown O'Fallon.

"I am extremely proud to be a part of this community-minded group of volunteers," said President Lambaria. "So many talented hands have transformed this once empty lot into a beautiful garden that feeds and educates our community. Isn't it amazing what a garden club can do?"

For more information about the O'Fallon Garden Club and its initiatives, please visit <https://ofallongardenclub.com>, find them on Facebook, or contact:

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