

For the past year I have had the privilege of introducing you to horticultural therapy (HT): whom it serves, how it benefits, and different types of settings. This month I have the privilege of writing about my friend, HT colleague, and mentor and the prestigious award she received for her tireless work in the field of HT here in New Jersey.

MaryAnne McMillan, HTR, received the John Walker Community Service Award from the American Horticultural Therapy Association at the AHTA national conference held in Asheville, N.C., at the end of October.

The Award is in recognition of significant contribution to horticultural therapy in the area of program services provided for a community. McMillan accepted the award for her work in Mercer County with Allies Farm "Project Grow": A Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model implemented by Allies, Inc. located in Hamilton, N.J. The company, founded in 1999, serves to find the absolute best homes and provide the



## Horticultural Therapy

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### National Horticultural Therapy Award Grown in New Jersey

highest quality of support services to enhance the physical, social and emotional lives of people with special needs, enabling them to become active participants in their communities. "I was thrilled to be acknowledged with this national award from the AHTA," said McMillan.

Allies Inc. through the CSA Project Grow and Mercer County Community College (MCCC) have partnered to create a unique community integrated program experience for participants with special needs. The MCCC DREAM program (Developing Real Expectations for Achieving Mastery) was developed for students with intellectual disabilities who are looking for an inclusive, challenging educational opportunity with supports and services to help

them achieve success. Project Grow is located on the MCCC campus and its role is to offer participants a creative way to build positive relationships through employment, volunteerism and horticultural therapy. Most people with developmental disabilities still have limited employment choices with entry level jobs and workshop settings. The Allies Project Grow CSA offers opportunities for individuals with disabilities who enjoy working outside to do so, allowing them to be part of a viable business and to earn money.

"Results include a successful planting season where crops will be harvested and sold. Employees develop their skills and learn from the Horticultural Therapist, Agriculturist, job coaches, day

program managers, volunteers and each other. In addition they develop connections with other farmers, so that we can market others' produce to complement our own plantings," said McMillan. The HT works with the consumers on meeting the goals and objectives set within Project Grow and their Individual Health Plans (IHP's). The job coaches and day program managers work with the HT to establish and implement vocational training skills.

Along with the farm-based program at MCCC, gardens have been established at four group homes in Mercer, Ocean and Somerset Counties and led by McMillan, to provide the "farm" experience along with the goals and objectives to those unable to travel

to the Allies Farm. Day programs make it possible for Project Grow outreach. One such program is at the Costello Day facility in Old Bridge, where Horticultural Therapy activities are run under the direction of HT Jean D'Amore. This award could not have been possible without the support of Allies, Jean, and the AHTA Award Committee," said McMillan. For more information, McMillan can be reached at [mcmillan@alliesnj.org](mailto:mcmillan@alliesnj.org).

*Editors Note: Laura DePrado, is a horticultural specialist, educator, and owner of Final Touch Landscaping, LLC; 2011 Somerset County Board of Agriculture Thomas Everett Continuing Education Memorial Scholarship; Laura has a Horticultural Therapy Certificate Rutgers University, BS Journalism, is a Certified Rutgers NJAES Master Gardener of Somerset County; member of AHTA & MAHTN, NJNLA and NJ Farm Bureau. Laura can be reached at [Laura@finaltouchlandscaping.com](mailto:Laura@finaltouchlandscaping.com)*