

DUNCAN STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN



*Funding, technical assistance and training provided by
The Parks & People Foundation*

To passersby, the Duncan Street Community Garden may seem like a green rectangle in the middle of the North Avenue-Collington Avenue-Terrell Place-Chester Street block in East Baltimore. But to Lewis Sharpe, the garden functions as the “lungs of the neighborhood.” And to the neighboring residents of Broadway East, it’s much, much more.

Lewis Sharpe, a tall, fatherly man, is the unofficial, yet highly regarded manager of the Duncan Street Community Garden. When asked about his role in the garden’s history and success, Lewis simply credits his parents and sister for his love of gardening and commitment to maintaining the garden. A Baltimore resident, Lewis first came to the city from rural Virginia to work at the U.S. Steel Plant in Sparrows Point. Now retired, Lewis spends most of his time in the garden. Anyone who knows Lewis also knows that he thoroughly enjoys the time he spends outside in the ever-expanding oasis.

Twenty years ago, the Duncan Street Community Garden site contained old row houses on an alley that had fallen into extreme disrepair. When the crumbling structures were eventually torn down, the area was used as an illegal dumping site. In 1989, the Pharaoh’s Club, a local men’s association, took hold of the site and created a beautiful vegetable garden there. When the garden was planted, Pharaoh’s Club members convinced the City of Baltimore to officially close the alley to traffic and have it gated. Soon afterward, the Duncan Street Community Garden began to thrive.

Once an average-sized garden, the garden on Duncan Street is now so large that it has the feel

of a cooperative farm. This closed-off section of Duncan Street runs the entire length of the garden and vegetable beds have been planted on both sides of the road. Strawberries, watermelon, broccoli, tomatoes and beans are just a few examples of the variety of plants grown annually by about a half-dozen community gardeners on Duncan Street. The area truly takes your breath away - it’s such a strong contrast to its surroundings – a mixture of vacant and well-cared-for row homes.

During the winter of 2005, the Parks & People Foundation and the Civic Works crew helped improve the Duncan Street Community Garden further by renovating the raised planting beds. Non-toxic treated timbers were installed to replace old railroad ties that had crumbled. Additional boards were used to create a façade and they were painted a vibrant shade of green to blend in with the natural beauty of the garden. Such activity in the garden during the dead of winter created a lot of interest from garden caretakers and their neighbors. Everyone was excited about getting help with garden improvements.

Although the Duncan Street Community Garden covers only a small percentage of East Baltimore, it has made a significant impact on the lives of many Broadway East residents, including Lewis Sharpe. The garden is truly Lewis’ “lifeblood.” He takes full responsibility for the garden’s continued success and spends the majority of his retirement tending to individual plants and maintenance projects within the area. Lewis Sharpe sets an example to follow and his efforts towards improving the Broadway East neighborhood will long be recognized.

WHO

Lewis Sharpe, Garden Manager

WHAT

Duncan Street Community Garden

WHERE

North & Collington Avenues, Broadway East

WHEN

Est. 1989 by the Pharaoh’s Club

WHY

To add natural beauty to an urbanized area

