

GARDENS

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they move their produce garden to their front patio, an even shorter walk to their kitchen. And would you believe, when harvesting their crops, not a speck of dirt soils their living-room carpet, or drops on the floor on the short trip into the kitchen?

No, the Leasons aren't freakishly neat, nor do they live in a space-aged "Jetsons" house with conveyor belts or teleporters. On the contrary, the Leasons enjoy gardening both inside and outside of their traditional Colonial thanks to an innovative vertical growing structure called a Tower Garden.

It is a state-of-the-art aeroponic growing system, which they say produces staggeringly delicious fruits and vegetables with little more than air and water. (Aeroponics is the process of growing plants in air or a moist, soil-less environment.)

The secret? A modern-day twist on ancient technology supposedly used in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Tower Garden works by growing produce in a nutrient-dense environment of vertical cascading water that bathes and feeds the roots of the plants. Unlike soil gardening, roots in the Tower Garden get plenty of aeration and don't have to fight off the microbes that

compete for the plants' growth and health.

The result, say the Leasons, is produce that tastes like what your great-grandparents grew, but with a 21st-century environmentalist's gloss: fruits and vegetables that grow in half the time, requiring just 10 percent of the water, nutrients and real estate required of conventional soil gardening. Equally, if not more appealing: no dirt, weeds, tilling, kneeling or weeding required.

Approximately five feet tall and made of food-grade white plastic, each Tower Garden holds up to 28 plants and fits in a 2.5-foot-by-2.5-foot area. The system waters the plant roots in 15-minute cycles; between waterings, the roots are exposed to beneficial oxygen, "so even a brown thumb will have a difficult time over- or under-watering," says Lolli approvingly, as she is a chef and not a gardener like her husband.

She and Bob are now growing lettuces, spinach, kale, chard, arugula, bok choy, peas, broccoli, cucumber, squashes, watermelon, tomatoes, bell and hot peppers, basil, cilantro, dill, sage, chives, mint, edible flowers and strawberries, and are getting ready to try eggplant.

"You can plant your entire vegetable garden in one tower," Bob explains.

In fact, the Tower Garden is versatile enough

to grow almost any fruit or vegetable that doesn't grow on a tree (such as apples) or in the soil (like potatoes), as well as a variety of herbs and flowers.

"We started our first Tower in early March and were able to have our first salad on Easter," Lolli recalls.

In addition to yielding delicious produce with no back breaking or dirt under fingernails required, Tower Gardens are environmentally educational and even trendy. They are an example of vertical farming, which futurists see as the perfect antidote to a planet whose population growth is rapidly outpacing its capacity to feed itself with traditional agricultural practices.

"Vertical farms, many stories high, will be situated in the heart of the world's urban centers," states Dr. Dickson Despommier, professor of environmental sciences at Columbia University, and author of "The Vertical Farm: Feeding the World in the 21st Century."

He adds, "If successfully implemented, they offer the promise of urban renewal, sustainable production of a safe and varied food supply, and the eventual repair of ecosystems that have been sacrificed for horizontal farming."

Sample vertical growing technologies have been on view for several years at the Living With the Land Pavilion at Disney's Epcot

Center, and more recently at O'Hare Airport (a giant vegetable garden between Terminals 2 and 3), and even the rooftop of a West Village New York City gourmet restaurant. Vertical gardens are even achieving interior-design status, serving as lush, verdant centerpieces to stark minimalist décor.

"I call it Prozac on a wall," quips a New Jersey vertical garden owner in a recent Wall Street Journal article covering the trend ("Interior Gardens Hit the Wall," May 30, 2012).

The Leasons' Tower Garden was invented by Tim Blank, who spent 12 years at Epcot Center researching and refining innovative growing technologies as he worked his way up from intern to chief horticulturist and greenhouse manager of the Living with the Land Pavilion. In 2005, he left Epcot to launch his own company, Future Growing, to sell Tower Gardens for large-scale commercial applications.

Earlier this year, Blank partnered with NSA, the maker of Juice PLUS whole food nutrition products, to make the Tower Garden available for residential use.

"The partnership is a perfect marriage to our company mission statement," says Lolli, a Juice PLUS health-and-wellness educator. "American families desperately want solutions and choice in being able to obtain nutritious

home-grown, organic, vine-ripened and GMO-free food. In today's world that is not easy."

Lolli has been a JuicePlus educational rep for seven years, and with Bob's help, is now excited to spread the nutritional and ecological benefits of vertical farming through the Tower Garden.

"It is great for an older couple that can't physically tend to a garden anymore, the condo owner with a sunny balcony, a restaurant owner who spends a lot of money on organic produce and herbs, a school classroom or the busy family. There are so many creative possibilities," says Lolli.

A Tower Garden system costs approximately \$500 and comes with everything you need to start your garden, including seed starter kit, plant food tonic, timer and pump. For help and information, contact the Leasons: Bob at farmerbob.towergarden.com or farmerbob.towergarden@gmail.com, Lolli at Lolli.juicedup@gmail.com or LLeasonjuiceplus.com, or by phone at 781-820-0942.

A Tower Garden is also currently flourishing on view at Carr Nursery & Garden Center, 10 Tioga Way.

Alessandra Bianchi lives in Marblehead and writes about lifestyle, culture, and clever entrepreneurs.

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Poll of the Week

· Should the statue of former Penn State coach Joe Paterno be removed from the school's campus? Log on to take the poll and see results so far.

Clarification

After publishing last week's front-page story on the post-July 4 stabbing on Washington Street, the Reporter received additional information, which clarified facts that had been misconstrued due to the redaction of witness names and other private information in the police reports we had received.

Most notable among these newly clarified facts is that the person whom Schwartz reportedly told police had been trying to "hook up" with his girlfriend and his alleged victim are not the same person.

There is no indication that Schwartz and his alleged victim had any contact prior to July 5.

SELECTMEN

From Page A1

structures visible from any public way" in the town's historic districts, according to the town website.

With the rest of the commission, Mitchell will have authority to approve or reject proposed changes to buildings or property within the districts and will seek to ensure that such changes are "appropriate for the streetscape and neighborhood."

In her letter of interest and in her brief interview, Mitchell explained that she and her husband have lived in the district since 1986, owning houses on Washington and Pearl streets, and that they have appeared several times as petitioners before the commission to propose repair and restoration projects.

Selectman Judy Jacobi

offered that that experience, which Mitchell verified had been positive and not adversarial, would be very helpful.

"We're very lucky to have you apply," Jacobi said.

Chairwoman Jackie Belf-Becker added that Mitchell was "certainly very well suited" to serve on the commission and a "tremendous addition."

Mitchell was appointed to a full term on the commission, which will expire in May 2013.

Other openings

The board will next turn its attention to vacancies on the Council on Aging Board of Directors, Disabilities Commission, the three-year term on the Planning Board that no one sought in this past May's town election and an alternate position on the Harbors and Waters Board, for which interviews will be held at the

board's July 25 meeting.

The deadline to apply for the Council on Aging board has passed; for the other positions, letters of interest will be accepted through Friday, July 20.

Meanwhile, there are a number of other boards and commissions with open seats. The selectmen extended until the end of August the deadline for residents to express interest in a seat on the Zoning Board of Appeals with a term to expire in 2013, and no deadline has been

set for openings on the following boards: Affordable Housing Trust Fund (two one-year terms), Cable TV Oversight Committee (three-year term), Conservation Commission (three-year term), fence viewer (one-year term), Finance Committee (two positions available, one term expiring in 2014, the other in 2015), alternate on the Old and Historic Districts Commission (one-year term), Smart Growth Committee (one-year term) and Taxation

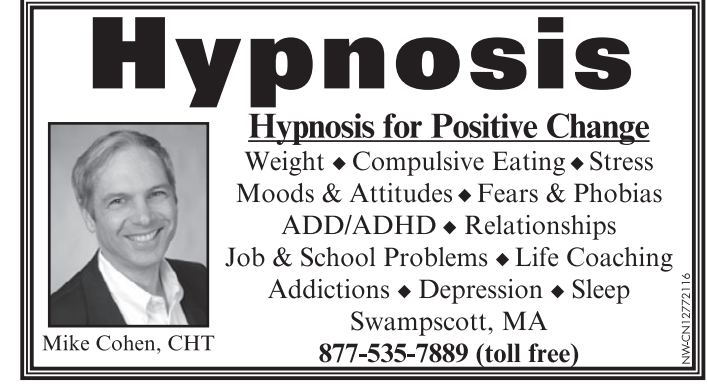
Aid Committee (one-year term).

Residents can learn more about the various positions by visiting the town website, marblehead.org, and clicking on "Boards, Commissions & Officials" under the Town Government tab, or by calling the selectmen's office, 781-631-0000.

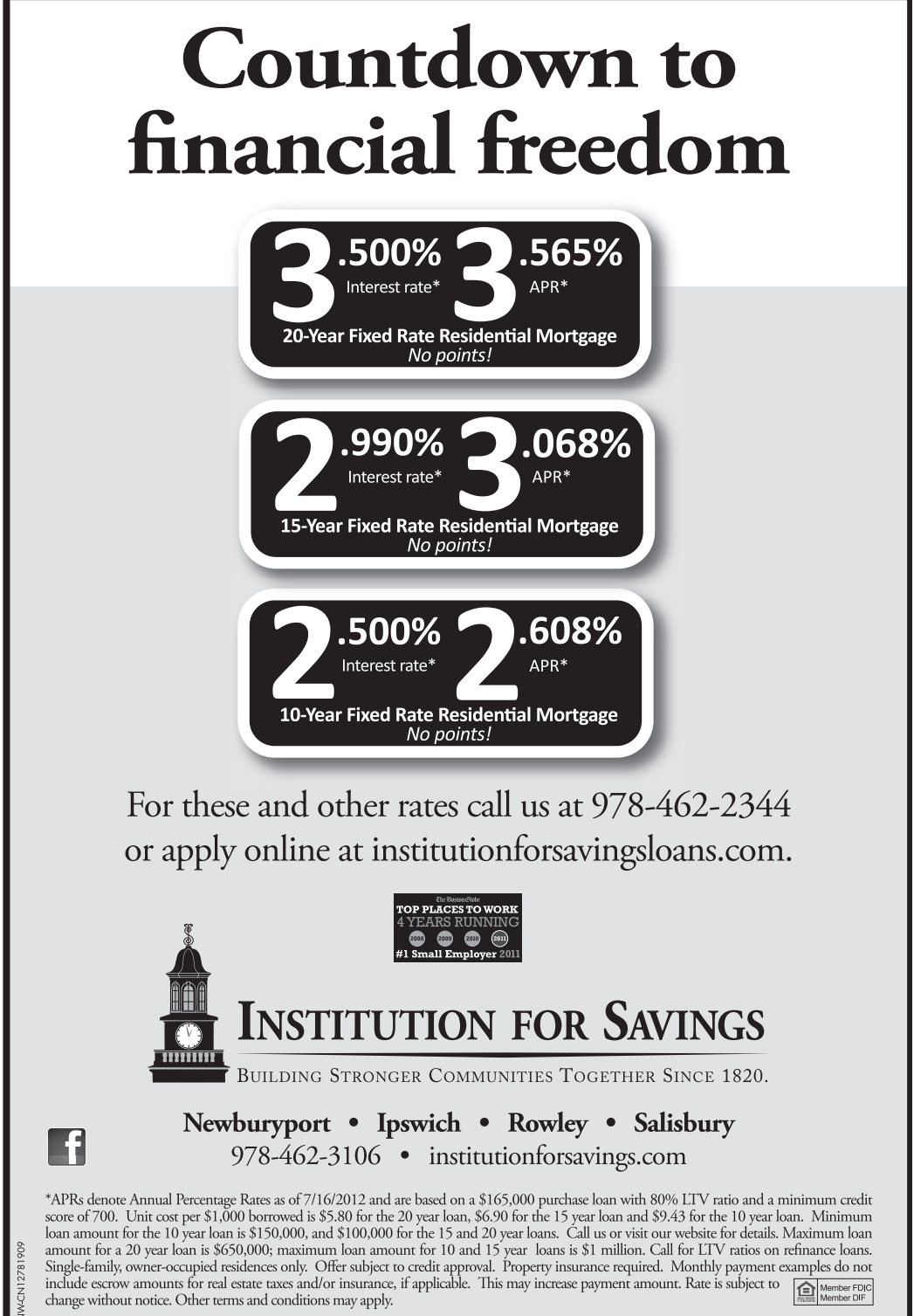
Letters of interest should be sent to the Board of Selectmen's Office at Abbot Hall, 188 Washington St., Marblehead, MA 01945.



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