



Judy Barron / Contributed photo

Barbara Kennedy, a cook at CDR, after delivery of a hanging plant, gifted by Branford Garden Club's Amy Graver.

6/26/90

A blooming success

Garden Club donates flowers to Community Dining Room volunteers

By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — In early June, Amy Graver, a member of the Branford Garden Club, reached out to Judy Barron, executive director of the Community Dining Room.

"I asked her to tell me about Barbara Kennedy, what she liked," she recalled.

Graver had responded to an appeal from the Garden Club to make bouquets for CDR volunteers as a gesture of appreciation for their service, and was assigned Kennedy, who's continued as a cook in the kitchen since the pandemic hit.

Graver, a single mother of two teenagers, "has been taking advantage of CDR's food and meals here and there when needed," she said, and was eager to show her thanks to Kennedy, among the 47 CDR kitchen volunteers and drivers to receive flower arrangements last Wednesday.

According to Branford Garden Club vice president Nancy Judd, the idea originated in frustration.

"In ordinary times, Garden Club members make fresh flower arrangements to brighten the tables at the CDR each week," she said.

These are not ordinary times. For over three months, the dining room has been closed. The tables have been empty.

"Knowing we couldn't get in, I kept thinking what the heck could we do," Judd said.

She dialed Barron. They discussed flowers for each of the families and individuals that visit the dining room. That seemed a tall task. Then Barron caught sight of a volunteer hurrying past her office with a head of lettuce.

She knew the numbers: the 31 volunteers in the kitchen making upwards of 5,000 meals a month for takeout and delivery, the 16 drivers making 300 deliveries to residents each month.

"I have an idea," Barron told Judd.

It became a team effort, according to Judd, with 36 Garden Club members making bouquets and flower arrangements for each of their "adopted" volunteers.

Some made the arrangements themselves. Others took advantage of curbside delivery at Shelley's Garden Center, Van Wilgens, or Myers Flower Shop, as well as Big Y, Stop & Shop, and Vaiuso Farms.

Last Wednesday morning, members dropped off the bouquets and plants at the CDR. Among them was Graver. By then, she'd learned Kennedy liked to garden, and as a gardener herself, she knew "gardeners typically want plants rather than flower arrangements," she said.

She found an impressively-sized hanging plant with white petunias at Van Wilgens. With a personal note, which members were asked to pen, she included a \$25 gift card, "so she could go back and pick up something for her garden," Graver said.

"These beautiful things keep sprouting and it's because the earth is already rich here in Branford," said Barron, as she stood among the brilliant combinations of snapdragons, zinnias, and marigolds.

Judd, also the chair of the Club's garden therapy committee, agreed. "Flowers show you care, they lift the spirit," she said, as she prepared to make her deliveries to CDR volunteers around town.

That apparently was the case for Kennedy, a cook with no specialties, as she described herself, because, as the daughter of a French chef, "I grew up cooking everything."

She pronounced the petunias "gorgeous," and said she plans to hang the plant near a brook in her backyard. "I feel very appreciated," she added.

Given Graver's response, it's fair to say that the initiative was a blooming success.

"No one is more grateful than we are, and we're so happy to make a small gesture to say thank you to Barbara and all the other volunteers who put themselves out there on the front line for us every day," she said.

► For information on joining the Branford Garden Club, visit www.branfordgardenclub.org.