

## Face-to-Face's Vaval serves meals to hundreds a day through the COVID crisis

Three days a week, Altenor Vaval leaves his wife and two children to head to 123 Price Street in Germantown, where he dons a mask and stands at the head of a line.

The line sometimes stretches 100, 120 or even 140 people long, and is a human quilt woven of men, women, the elderly, the homeless - people waiting for what may be their only meal for that day, or for a few days.

The lines get longer toward the end of each month, when supplemental money from the government has worn thin in local households.



### Food For Thought

by April Lisante

This routine has become everyday life for Vaval, the director of operations and food services at Face to Face in Germantown, a non-profit that has been feeding the needy and the homeless for more than 35 years. As the head chef who typically prepares hot meals for 500 needy residents a week, he has seen the COVID-19 crisis only intensify the need for basic nourishment in this community.



Altenor Vaval, the director of operations and food services at Face to Face in Germantown, a non-profit that has been feeding the needy and the homeless for more than 35 years, now leads the organization's efforts to feed people at the center during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since March, he has spent his Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays not in the kitchen but at the head of the outdoor line with a smile and a bag of food to hand to each person. He hopes with each smile, he is brightening a day.

"Food connects people, food is a healing process," Vaval said. "I love seeing the joy on their faces, so anything I can do, I try to do my best each day."

"He's the real hero," said Face to Face executive director Mary Kay Meeks-Hank. "Chef has been organizing all the teams."

The Haitian-born Vaval came to Face to Face a little more than six years ago. After attending culinary school in Boston, he came to live with family in New Jersey and stumbled upon a job opening at Face to Face, which was looking for a chef. When he arrived, he estimated about 80 to 90 percent of the food made in the kitchen for the needy was canned. He immediately went to work infusing the cuisine with the fresh produce and ingredients he'd learned to use in Haiti while cooking with his beloved grandmother.

"I said that the best way I can show my heritage was to focus on fresh foods and vegetables," Vaval said.

"For me, a meal is a way to gather together and share her-  
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## Mt. Airy 'Queen' giving free pet food to those in need

By Stacia Friedman

Every local business has been hit by the pandemic. Queenie's Pets in Mount Airy, is no exception. "We lost 80% of our dog walking business," said owner Adina Silberstein. What Silberstein, 44, hasn't lost is her dedication to the community and her love of animals.

"We understand that many people are unemployed and afraid they cannot afford to keep their pets. So starting on May 7, we launched Queenie's Kibble Kitchen, a no-contact, drive-thru, free food pantry for dogs and cats," Silberstein said. "Every other Thursday from 4 to 6 p.m., pet owners can drive to our West Mount Airy Street entrance, remain inside their car, tell us what kind of pets they have, and Kibble Kitchen volunteers in masks and gloves will load food and litter directly into your car."

The service will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis while supplies last. Walk-ups are not permitted in order to maintain safe social distancing.

"The goal is to provide food and supplies for the dogs and cats that provide crucial emotional support during this time of crisis," said Silberstein.



Adina Silberstein (middle), owner of Queenie's Pets, 7174 Germantown Ave., is seen with Montgomery Jones (left), retail manager, and Hannah Babcock, operations manager. (Photo by Stacia Friedman)

Queenie's Kibble Kitchen is funded by online donations from the community.

"We set up a Venmo account at @QueeniesKK," Silberstein said. "We have received donations

ranging from \$5 to \$500. Before the end of the first week, we had raised \$1,000."

This effort reflects her company's mission: "Making the lives of pets and their humans better."

For Silberstein, this is an opportunity to give back to the community that has supported her since she first launched Queenie's Pets from her home in 2006, now located at 7174 Germantown

Ave., next door to McMenamin's Tavern.

"I attribute my success to the community," she said. "When I first started my dog-walking service, I had eight clients. Now I have 18 employees."

Previously a middle school teacher and manager of catering services at Cresheim Cottage Cafe, Silberstein traces her love of animals back to her childhood.

"I grew up in Mt. Airy and have always been obsessed with animals," she said. "When I got married, I vowed to love my husband as much as I loved my cat."

These days, Silberstein is the owner of a Rottweiler-Scottish Terrier mix named Melodrama and four cats, all rescues.

What started as a dog-walking and pet-sitting business has evolved into a full range of services designed to meet pet owners' needs at every stage. Queenie's Meet-n-Greet is a prerequisite to all services they offer. A store manager and a potential walker or sitter come to the client's home for an hour to meet the pets and "sniff" each other to make sure they are a good match.

Their Wedding Bells Package transports your furry friend to and from the wedding venue, plus an  
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# LOCAL RESTAURANT GUIDE

# 'The Greatest,' a poignant film about grief and loss



Aaron Johnson and Carey Mulligan in "The Greatest."

Each week, veteran film critic Bill Wine will look back at an important film that is worth watching, either for the first time or again.

We've had plenty to grieve about of late. But here's a fine 2010 movie that's about grief with a title that refers not to an accomplishment but to a particular kind of grief: dealing with the loss of a child.

"The Greatest" is an exquisitely sad drama about the death of a young man and his grieving parents' attempt to get over their psychologically disastrous loss.

Susan Sarandon and Pierce Brosnan play Grace and Allen Brewer, an affluent couple whose lives are turned upside down when

their 18-year-old son, Bennett (Aaron Johnson), is killed in an auto accident, leaving behind an adoring younger brother, Ryan (Johnny Simmons). The three survivors begin to deal with their misery and suffering in very different, idiosyncratic ways.

Grace wants to know every detail of not only her late son's life but the way he died as well, asking about the several minutes between the car wreck and his actual death

so as to indulge her pain and work through it. She even makes contact with the man who was driving the car that crashed into her son.

Allen, on the other hand, a math professor who finds modest comfort in numbers, stays somewhat removed from the specifics, trying to show no outward signs of grief and staying as close as he can to what would be his normal schedule. But it's no surprise that he has insomnia, and it's obvious that he hasn't fully internalized what he is actually going through.

Ryan, medicated on drugs, joins a support group for people who have suffered monumental losses, where he meets Ashley (Zoe Kravitz), who has lost a sister.

Then someone else comes into the Brewers' lives. Carey Mulligan plays Rose, a classmate of Bennett's whom the Brewers have never met, who was in the car when he died and survived the horrific accident with only minor injuries. As she explains to the Brewers, she and Bennett had only recently met and begun a romantic relationship, so she has lots of questions about their son.

She also reveals that she is pregnant by Bennett, that she intends to keep the baby, and that she is alienated from her own family. Grace is skeptical, Allen hospitable and sympathetic.

Grace finds herself resentful of a number of things, not the least of them her husband's unconventional manner of grieving and this interloping young woman's sketchy role in her son's death. But the Brewers take Rose in anyway.

Debuting writer-director Shana Feste's film recalls Robert Redford's Oscar-winning "Ordinary People" in its psychological concerns and was apparently strongly influenced by it. Feste's sensitive, affecting, semi-autobiographical screenplay -- which forces the somber mood on you early on and even finds a way to send you home feeling good -- has the ring of truth, and keeps the pivotal character of Bennett alive for us with its use of flashbacks throughout.

The skillfully restrained cast is uniformly fine. Sarandon gives a characteristically nuanced reading that registers completely, while executive producer Brosnan, playing against type, gets the chance to show a range we haven't seen before. And Simmons shines in a key supporting role. As for the remarkably commanding Mulligan, she demonstrates vividly that her Best Actress Oscar nomination for "An Education" was no fluke.

A powerfully heart-wrenching and resonant melodrama about the family repercussions of tragic

(Continued on page 27)



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Altenor Vaval in Face to Face's kitchen.

## Face-to-Face's Vaval serves meals to hundreds

(Continued from page 25)

itage, joy and pain. It's a way to sit down together and get to know the person you talk with in a precise way," he said.

That became his mantra at Face to Face, the mantra he lovingly enacted to cook 500 meals a week before the pandemic hit and the kitchen closed at the Price Street center. Now, instead of cooking, he spends his days on the front line, distributing food and coordinating produce deliveries from a Bucks County farm, hot meals from Philadelphia chef Jose Garces, and donated hoagie bags from Wawa. Since the quarantine began in March, the organization has not used volunteers to hand out goods. Vaval and the bare bones staff are responsible for keeping the community healthy and fed.

"I am focused now more on the distribution," Vaval said. "The challenge has been connecting the dots from the donors to bring the meals to us. It is a lot to coordinate. The hours I work are behind the scenes."

On Mondays, the Garces restaurant organization delivers hot meals. These hot meals are paired with bags of canned goods that are given to those who line up between 12 and 2 p.m. On Tuesdays, Vaval is at Face to Face to make sure produce deliveries

arrive from a local farm. When Thursday rolls around, he is back outside from 12 to 2 p.m., distributing Wawa hoagie bags to the hungry.

But Friday might just be his favorite day. There are plenty more Wawa bags to distribute, but Vaval also presents bags of fresh produce, rice, beans, eggs and

potatoes to those in line. The staples may seem simple enough, but to a hungry family, it is much, much more.

"I like to see the smiles on their faces, and the food lets them have a nice weekend," said Vaval. "I love people. My joy is to work with people from all different cultures. We have become a family."

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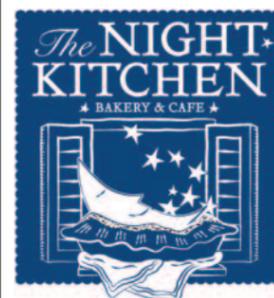
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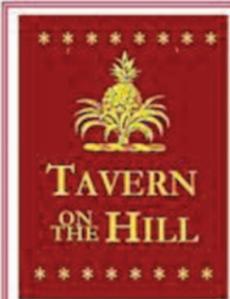
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## Mt. Airy 'Queen' giving free pet food to those in need

(Continued from page 25) overnight for up to two pets. They also offer Labor & Delivery Packages to make sure your pets are in good hands while you are making your own special delivery. Plus a Newborn Relief Package for sleep-deprived new parents who would like to be relieved of morning dog walks.

Queenie's Pets opened their storefront in 2015, carrying just a few items like leashes and some toys.

"It wasn't until last summer that we added pet food, including brands such as Verus, Acana, Fromm's, Blue Buffalo and Taste of the Wild. We can also get big brand names like Purina and Royal Canin," said Silberstein.

"We also offer a crate rental program for those fostering dogs or who aren't sure what size they will end up needing, and we do harness rental programs for growing puppies."

Don't see what you want? Queenie's will custom-order for you. They also stock flea and tick protection and can make I.D. tags in their shop.

Among the many advantages of buying from a local business is their ability to deliver faster than corporate companies.

"Chewy is behind three weeks in deliveries, and we are not," said Silberstein.

"Queenie's is a great neighborhood resource," said Ann Mintz, of Mt. Airy, who donated to the Kibble Kitchen. "I'm proud to help launch an initiative that will enable our neighbors to take care of their beloved pets."

Mintz, who has four dogs and three cats, has been using Queenie's for almost 10 years.

"Our dogs adore their Queenie's caregivers," she said. "They go ballistic with joy when we run into one of them in the park."

For more information, visit [QueeniesPets.com](http://QueeniesPets.com).

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# A new fresh produce option for Germantown residents

By Brenda Lange

Germantown residents soon will have the option to buy fresh, organic, locally grown produce throughout the summer as part of a new buying club, or community supported agriculture (CSA), getting ready to launch next month. At this time, the program is for residents of the 19144 zip code only.

Germantown Grocer is one part of the urban design consulting firm, Sally Blagg, owned and operated by David Rose, a Germantown resident since 2016. Sally Blagg, which employs five people, took its name from Rose's grandmother "five times removed," who came from the Carolinas. Rose describes his work as "asset-based community development and creative problem solving." Through their work, Sally Blagg works with individuals who bring their talents and skills to the table, creating the assets on which the community will be developed.

Germantown's rich history — in part, housing President George Washington during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 when Philadelphia was under quarantine — attracted Rose, 35, who earned a degree in urban and public policy with minors in architecture and environmental design from the University of Buffalo. He studied in a historic preservation program at the University of Pennsylvania and worked with Partners for Sacred Places, whose mission is to protect church communities, and has found a lot of local support for historic preservation as he builds his network.

"Originally, I thought that Germantown needed food options and co-op access, and I wanted a full-scale grocer," said Rose, "but after looking at market trends and talking to many people, I decided we needed something new school that was also old school."

Rose says that, generally, it's next to impossible to find fresh produce on a regular basis in Germantown, and part of his larger plan is to build to a point that that will no longer be true. Starting on June 21, residents of the 19144 area code who sign up either at [sallyblagg.com/grocer](http://sallyblagg.com/grocer) or 215-436-5126 will receive a list of produce from which to place their order for a \$30 box of seasonal, fresh, organic vegetables and local fruits. Buyers will be given a time slot for curbside pick-up, or in the case of certain residents, will schedule a home delivery.

The program will run for 13 weeks.

Rose says that he has commissioned wooden, reusable produce boxes from local craftsmen for Grocer members to transport their orders. They also may bring their own reusable grocery bags. No plastic or paper packaging will be used in Germantown Grocer.

"We have developed relationships with local urban farmers, many of whom farm for their families and maybe extra for their neighbors. But there is a gap. Not everyone is farming, and that is our demographic," said Rose. "We would love to teach everyone to farm on the many vacant lots around the city, but for now, we're providing a service to the local farmers who are looking to get to

market and to those who want to consume their produce."

Recipes will be available online and through direct mail for his clients to help home chefs learn how best to utilize what may be, in some cases, unfamiliar ingredients. Ultimately, Rose wants to include a teaching kitchen in the Sally Blagg headquarters at 5520 Germantown Ave. The 1900-square-foot space will be large enough for the Grocer, a kitchen and community spaces for meetings and educational uses.

For more information, visit [sallyblagg.com](http://sallyblagg.com) or call 215-839-6732.

Brenda Lange is an award-winning freelance writer and former editor of the Chestnut Hill College alumni magazine.



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Chestnut Hill Kurfiss.com/PAPH891592 \$2,995,000



### Featured Property: Cresswell Manor

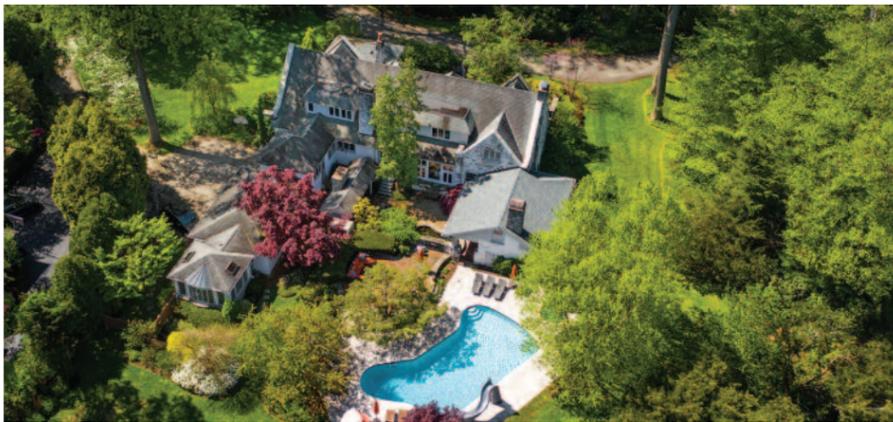
6BR/6.1BA 7,335SF 3.43AC Melanie Stecura: 917.757.4309 Linda Knox: 215.901.6653  
Chestnut Hill Kurfiss.com/PAPH891592 \$2,995,000

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### Quality Custom Construction

3BR/4.1BA 7,487SF 2.91AC Private Open Floor Plan Douglas Pearson: 267.907.2590  
Meadowbrook [Kurfiss.com/PAMC619436](https://www.kurfiss.com/PAMC619436) \$1,500,000



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Rittenhouse Square [Kurfiss.com/PAPH820326](https://www.kurfiss.com/PAPH820326) \$1,350,000

# HOMES & Home

REAL ESTATE • INTERIOR DESIGN • BUSINESS Chestnut Hill Local

## Virtual re-design, part one: The challenge of a living room makeover

A few weeks ago, I had asked for readers interested in a virtual redesign of a space to send me photographs of rooms that needed some updating or a new look. I received many terrific photos and landed on a project belonging to a terrific couple, whose home we helped design nearly 20 years ago.

The owners of the home, Denise and Joe, are both creative themselves and wanted a home that was warm, inviting and

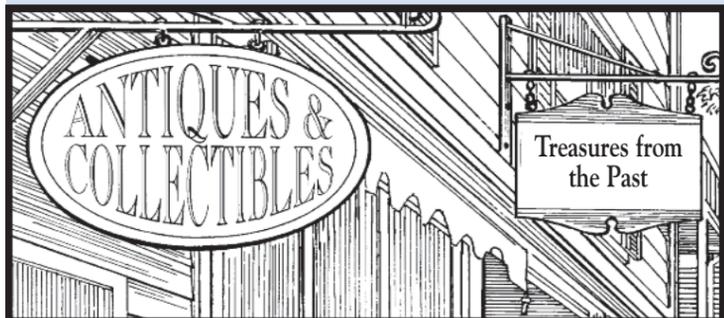
expressed their love of both traditional and modern furnishings and an aesthetic that would serve well for both entertaining, and comfortable living.

**By Design**

by Patricia Cove



Denise's and Joe's fabulous living room. How can we bring it into the 21st century?



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The photos accompanying this article are of the room as it was designed nearly 20 years ago. And although it still looks fabulous, there are some changes that could be made to bring it into the 21st century, while still maintaining that warm and welcoming feel.

The Dutch Colonial home, purchased in the early 90s, was solidly built, but the interior rooms were stark and devoid of interesting architectural features.

So Denise and Joe went about

adding deep crown moldings to the over eight-foot-high ceilings, purchased a beautiful fireplace surround from a Lambertville antique store and selected a warm color scheme of taupe and cream that would soon coordinate with furnishings and fabrics.

On either side of the fireplace, two symmetrical doorways lead into a sun porch/loggia room that would become a light filled workspace and office.

The seating arrangement natu-

rally surrounded the fireplace, and a flared, armed, tufted sofa was chosen, teamed with an existing, comfy loveseat that was recovered in a black and taupe miniature animal print. Buffalo silk plaid drapery panels atop three taupe silk shades were designed to feature a trompe l'oeil filigree decorative painting that was centered above the window frame and directly below the crown molding. A black and cream area rug delineated the seating arrangement with a rectangular cocktail table and rounded back armchair. The color black, used as accent throughout the room, complemented the warm tones and added sophistication within the space.

The room became a respite for Denise and Joe, especially after they converted the right-side sun-room entrance into a compact entertainment center. Folding French doors were added, and the interior mechanics and woodwork were all painted in dark tones to help camouflage the components. So, when the doors are closed the symmetry of the room remained.

Once the entertainment center was added, the room became more of a gathering space and took on the dual functions of entertaining and living. This avoided the common occurrence these days of ignoring a formal living room to spend time in a more informal family room/kitchen space. Denise and Joe began to realize that as beautiful as this room was, it was in need of some changes that would make it more appealing as this dual functioning space.

Now comes the fun! In Part Two of this project, we are going to explore the various ways that this room can become even more functional, while also taking on a more modern, twenty-first Century appearance! Watch for Part Two in the June 11 issue of the Local.

Patricia Cove is the Principal of Architectural Interiors and Design in Chestnut Hill, and can be reached through her web site at [www.patriciacove.com](http://www.patriciacove.com).

### The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

#### ACROSS

- 1 With-ring link
- 5 Army bases
- 10 L.A. problem
- 14 Gaggles greeting
- 15 Item in a Greek salad
- 16 Bone-dry
- 17 One opposed
- 18 Sideline for some journalists
- 20 Beach bird
- 21 Lord's Prayer starter
- 22 Search for food
- 23 Rule from the bench
- 26 Oust
- 28 Wide's partner
- 29 Check information
- 33 Renowned
- 34 Prefix with "shock"
- 36 Selfies, e.g.
- 37 Supply for a newborn
- 39 Run over
- 41 NY time zone
- 42 Waste away
- 44 More despicable
- 45 Marsh growth
- 47 Crime boss
- 48 Setting for "Lawrence of Arabia"
- 49 Reductions
- 52 Type of staircase
- 55 Word on a door
- 56 Finn's floater
- 59 If-all-else-fails strategy
- 61 Continental coin
- 62 Look like a creep
- 63 Grazing ground
- 64 PC maker
- 65 Angry, with "off"
- 66 Type of jacket
- 67 Kind of idol

#### DOWN

- 1 "Take \_\_\_!"

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14				15					16			
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33					34				35		36	
37						38		39			40	
41					42			43			44	
45			46		47				48			
			49	50				51				
52	53	54					55			56	57	58
59							60				61	
62											64	
65											67	

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- 2 Sharpen, as skills
- 3 Type of commerce
- 4 Like beauty, they say
- 5 Lame excuse
- 6 One way to read
- 7 Six-pack location
- 8 Pipe material
- 9 Columbus, for one
- 10 Abhorrence
- 11 Diva's rendition
- 12 Zestfulness
- 13 Perimeter
- 19 Boozier
- 24 World-weary
- 25 Like some remarks
- 26 Prefix for "age" or "arm"
- 27 Library no-no
- 30 Mott's offering
- 31 Flooring pro
- 32 Put forth, as effort
- 34 High-class tie
- 35 Baltimore player
- 38 Serious warning
- 40 Abuse
- 43 Buttercup's cousin
- 46 Moved like a squirrel
- 48 Needing a bit of body work
- 50 Watering hole
- 51 Use the on-ramp
- 52 Vegas
- 53 Patti who sang "Tennessee Waltz"
- 54 Cruise stopover
- 57 At no cost
- 58 Conflicted
- 60 Woodshop tool

#### Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

S	N	A	R	E	R	A	N	G	S	T	A	B
C	O	L	O	N	A	G	E	E	T	T	U	B
A	D	E	P	T	T	E	E	N	A	L	A	N
R	E	C	E	I	P	T	D	E	S	P	I	S
			S	T	R	A	P	R	A	L	P	H
F	L	Y	L	I	T	I	G	A	T	E		
L	O	O	S	E	N	D	E	L	E	G	A	T
A	B	U	T	C	A	G	E	S	U	F	O	S
K	E	R	O	S	E	N	E	T	U	N	E	U
			M	A	S	T	O	D	O	N	W	R
P	L	A	N	S	N	U	R	S	E			
C	R	A	C	K	L	E	R	E	T	R	E	A
R	O	T	H	E	A	S	E	R	A	D	I	I
A	N	T	E	I	R	E	S	A	S	I	D	E
W	E	E	D	A	N	T	S	P	E	T	E	R

# Gardening: How Valerie manages a container garden (and her husband)

By Stan Cutler

If you want low maintenance, high-reward gardening, containers are the way to go. You can put a container garden in a tiny back yard, a small deck or porch, a balcony, or a rooftop. Anyplace outside where you keep plants in containers qualifies. Most plants can thrive in pots, everything from flowering annuals to trees (in a big enough pot). You could even grow tomatoes. Do your houseplants a favor, take them outside. There you go - you are now the proprietor of a container garden.

Fifteen years ago, my wife, Valerie, the gardening fanatic, asked me to build her a deck off the kitchen. I envisioned cocktail hours. I should have known what she really wanted as we discussed the railing. She didn't care for any of the alternatives, deeming them either too expensive or too ugly. Then she decided that they were all too ugly, no matter how much they cost. What if, she said, we lined the outside of the deck with containers. That way, no one would get close enough to the edge to fall over. So far, after fifteen years, so good.

We put skirting around the deck and painted it light blue, the color of the window trim. On a Sunday junk store outing, Valerie paid five bucks for a rusty, hand-wrought plant holder, a single sinuous rod with rings for five small flowerpots. She took it home, wire-brushed it, and painted it. The ironware perfectly adorns the skirt facing the yard, almost as if Valerie had it mind in the first place.

She considers the appearance of the containers as important as the flowers they hold. She haunts yard sales and flea markets looking for large, ceramic pots with holes in the bottom. She does not sit them directly on the deck, but on three little pieces of wood, each about two inches long and a half-inch thick. This allows the water that drains from the bottom to evaporate, preserving the deck.

You can use store-bought flower boxes or easily build them yourself out of 1 x 8-inch lumber. DIY boxes have the advantage of being built to size. Cut up some plastic garbage bags and glue the material to the insides, otherwise the boxes will rot within a few years. Properly lined, they last at least ten years. I drill seven or eight one-inch holes in the bottoms and cover them with a layer of landscape fabric, a permeable material that drains while keeping the microbes and fungi in the potting soil from eating away at the



Valerie working on containers, a martini close at hand.

wood. Paint the outsides however you like. Attach strips of wood across the bottoms to allow air flow under them. Valerie uses the boxes for woody herbs like tarragon, thyme and rosemary and

puts flowering plants in the boxes with them.

Over the years, she has developed an approach to selecting the annual container plants. She'll shop for them over several weeks in early Spring and keep them in the shade until she has a few more than she has room for. To add interest, she selects a few specimens more for their showy leaves (e.g., begonia, coleus, oxalis) than for flowers. On planting day, with all of them on view, she selects them by color and texture to maximize their beauty. She uses an old serrated steak knife to gently score the root mass after she removes the plants from their store pots. Her favorite source is The Secret Garden in Roxborough with Primex in Glenside running a close second. She'll buy enough to put two, three or four plants in each large pot. Miraculously, she always finds room for the extras.

In the Autumn, we haul all of the pots to the tool shed. Your basement (if you have one) will do just as well. Over the Winter, the annuals die but the soil is usually okay in Springtime, especially since the new plants are in their own, new soil. Geraniums often survive the winter in the dry darkness. Remember to dead-head the spent geranium flowers regularly during the Summer and you'll be rewarded by bright blooms into October. The boxes stay out all year long, the woody herbs usually survive and begin leafing out again in May.

So, we have less of a deck than a platform for a container garden. There's just enough space for a couple of chairs and a tiny table on which to set my martini glass.

Stan Cutler is a local novelist, gardener's helper and volunteer for the Friends of the Chestnut Hill Library.



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