

AARP: Waupaca aeroponic vertical gardens proposal wins AARP WI's Small Dollar, Big Impact grant

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WAUPACA, Wis. – A proposal submitted by the Waupaca Senior Center to purchase a new vertical, aeroponic Tower Garden system has been selected to receive one of AARP Wisconsin's "Small Dollar, Big Impact" grants.

These \$1,000 grants are being awarded monthly in 2020 to projects in communities across Wisconsin that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age. The Tower Garden program is spearheaded by Sara Reybrock, Senior Center Coordinator, and Janet Heiner, Certified Nutrition Specialist and Personal Trainer at FIT Alternatives.

"This is a simple, low-cost investment in the physical, social, and mental health of senior citizens in our community," said Reybrock, who added that the garden will do more than just supply senior citizens with year-round access to organic greens and herbs. "It will also foster social participation for senior center members who create communal meals and snacks from the harvest."

By using aeroponics to grow plants with only water and nutrients, the Tower Garden will eliminate the hard labor and maintenance of traditional gardening while producing larger yields in less time, Reybrock explained.

Even in the cold of winter, the garden will allow seniors to participate in the process of quickly growing, harvesting, and preparing nutritious plants – all with minimal effort, making the process accessible to all.

From seeding to eating in a matter of weeks, the garden will provide an inclusive and rewarding opportunity for seniors to participate in the production and consumption of organic produce.

The program will support the health and happiness of the approximately 600 seniors who are members of the senior center, laying the foundation for growth in the future as new towers can be added as needed. By involving community facilitators to lead culinary workshops at harvest, this gardening program will foster intergenerational relationships and support the development of healthy habits for people of all ages, Reybrock said. This \$1,000 from AARP will enable the center to immediately acquire an indoor, aeroponic growing system that will provide fresh garden produce to our members year after year.

AARP Wisconsin's "Small Dollar, Big Impact" grants are being awarded once a month from June through November. Judges selected this project after receiving dozens of proposals. All projects must be completed within 60 days from winner announcement.

The Waupaca project fits perfectly with the spirit and intent of our grant program, said AARP Wisconsin State Director Sam Wilson. "Our goal is to support communities as they make positive changes that inspire long-term progress on livable issues. This project hits that nail right on the head."

"These grants are exactly what the name describes – short-term, low-cost solutions that could have remarkable impacts on the shaping of neighborhoods and cities," said Darrin Wasniewski, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin.

"There are so many great ideas and proposals for making life better in communities across Wisconsin. We know how impactful \$1,000 can be. This is our way of extending some seed money to get these projects off the ground."

The grant program is open to some nonprofits and government entities. Other organizations will be considered on a case-by-case basis. A full listing of grant requirements, expectations, deadlines can be found at www.aarp.org/wi