

ARTHUR VAZQUEZ, our **Master Gardener for the Summer Season**, is a recent May graduate in Class 62. Yet this year, he has already accumulated 67 hours of service as a Bexar County Master Gardener and 132 hours of community service as a USAA Golden Eagle. Arthur feels strongly that everyone has a duty to give back some of his or her time to better the community at large. For Arthur, more than anything, this means working with children, who will one day be the leading members of that community. For Arthur, this also means working tirelessly to interest children in gardening and healthy eating habits so that, in his words, these children will reach for a carrot instead of a candy bar as a snack and, thus, lessen their chances of one day developing the deadly disease of diabetes, which deprives adults of a normal, healthy lifestyle and, in the worst-case scenario, of their limbs, their eyesight and even their lives.

Arthur comes by his love of vegetable gardening naturally: it's in his genes. His father grew up on a ranch in Oklahoma during the depression. Arthur's grandparents were able to feed their family through those terrible years of scarcity by the food that they produced on their ranch. Later, when Arthur's father left Oklahoma to get a degree from Texas Christian University, and then moved on to San Antonio as a missionary for the Disciples of Christ, he too followed the family tradition of raising his own vegetables. Arthur has fond memories of helping his father in the garden at the early age of four. But the intervening years were to take him in an entirely different direction from the path that his grandparents and father before him had chosen.

Arthur too went to TCU, majoring in both Education and Fine Arts. His plan was to be a high school teacher. There is a saying: "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans!" This saying proved to be true for Arthur. When he graduated, his oldest brother begged him to come help him in his insurance business. Arthur agreed to hold up the property and casualty part of the business while his brother handled life insurance. To learn about this side of the insurance industry, Arthur became part of a special program to train insurance underwriters sponsored by Aetna Life and Casualty Insurance Company. Arthur remembers the awe he felt the first time he saw the Aetna Home Office building in Hartford, Connecticut: the largest brick building in the world! There began for Arthur months of intense training in what was to become his life-long profession: property and casualty insurance underwriting.

Arthur returned to his brother's agency, but, again, fate intervened. Another brother (Arthur is the youngest of five brothers) wanted his two siblings to join him in his insurance agency in Virginia. His older brother went, but Arthur elected to stay in San Antonio. After selling insurance on his own and then as an insurance agent with Walthall, Sachse and Pipes, Inc., Arthur answered a call from USAA for frontline underwriters who knew Texas underwriting for auto and home insurance. That was his job for the next sixteen years until he retired in 2014 as a Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriter.

USAA is a company that rewards its members who volunteer to serve the community. It was through their volunteer organization, the Golden Eagles, that Arthur became seriously involved in volunteer gardening activities. While working at the Botanical Gardens, he began helping with the Children's Vegetable Garden, and there he saw how gardening was important in children's lives. However, it was his own granddaughters, Danae and Natalie, who were the catalyst for the intense interest he now has in promoting gardening among children.

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Arthur naturally shared his enthusiasm for vegetable gardening with his granddaughters, so they were disappointed when their elementary school did not have a vegetable garden. When Danae, the oldest, went to Tex Hill Middle School, she also found, to her disappointment, that there was no garden club, nor any gardening beds at her new school. It then became Danae's wish to form a garden club at Tex Hill, a wish her grandfather helped her to fulfill. The project was soon set into motion. The school's PTSA (Parent, Teachers, Students Association) found a young man who needed a project to achieve Eagle Scout status. The PTSA then raised the money, and the future Eagle Scout built two raised beds measuring 6ft by 54 ft. The PTSA asked Arthur to be a co-sponsor of the school's garden club. So with the PTSA's and Arthur's help, Danae's wish for a garden and a garden club came true. That is also how Arthur, in fulfilling his granddaughter's wish, got sucked into what has now become his abiding passion: to provide the children of Bexar County the same gardening experience that his granddaughters now have.

To become better prepared to instruct both the teachers and students in gardening techniques, Arthur signed up for the summer training to become a Junior Master Gardener. Then, since he still felt the need for more knowledge about gardening, he entered the training to become a Certified Master Gardener, graduating last May as a member of Class 62.

Since his graduation Arthur has worked closely with Ruby Zavala, Youth Gardens Coordinator, to promote children's gardening activities. Together they have established a children's garden at the Las Palmas Elementary School and more such gardens will surely follow. When a teacher complained to Arthur that she couldn't find anyone in the Speakers Bureau to make a presentation on gardening to the 952 students at her elementary school, Arthur conveyed that complaint to Ruby and immediately stepped in to provide that service. Now Ruby has a person she can count on to give gardening presentations to children. The Master Gardeners also have someone they can count on whenever volunteers are needed. Arthur mans the Hotline every Wednesday from 1 to 4 pm and regularly helps Barbara Lutz and Jack Downey in any event that they are chairing and for which volunteers are needed.

And Arthur is a hard worker, thanks to his training with the Golden Eagles. According to Arthur, Golden Eagle volunteers drink their water and attend to their bathroom needs before the volunteer event, so that each volunteer can work non-stop. Arthur boasts that, at a recent volunteer session at the Food Bank, the Golden Eagle team was able to box up groceries for 5000 families in 2½ hours when the same job took other volunteer groups 3 hours.

Arthur does not propose the same rigor for Master Gardener volunteers, but he does lament that only a small number of Master Gardeners have been supporting the Schultze House project. Arthur would also like to see an increase to the variety of sanctioned projects for which Master Gardeners can accrue hours. As more folks go through Master Gardener training, he hopes they will be imbued, as he is, with the desire to serve the larger community providing an array of gardening education events and programs. Arthur Vazquez, our Master Gardener for the Summer Season, should serve as an inspiration to all Master Gardeners to put forth their best efforts to selflessly volunteer for service to our Bexar County community.