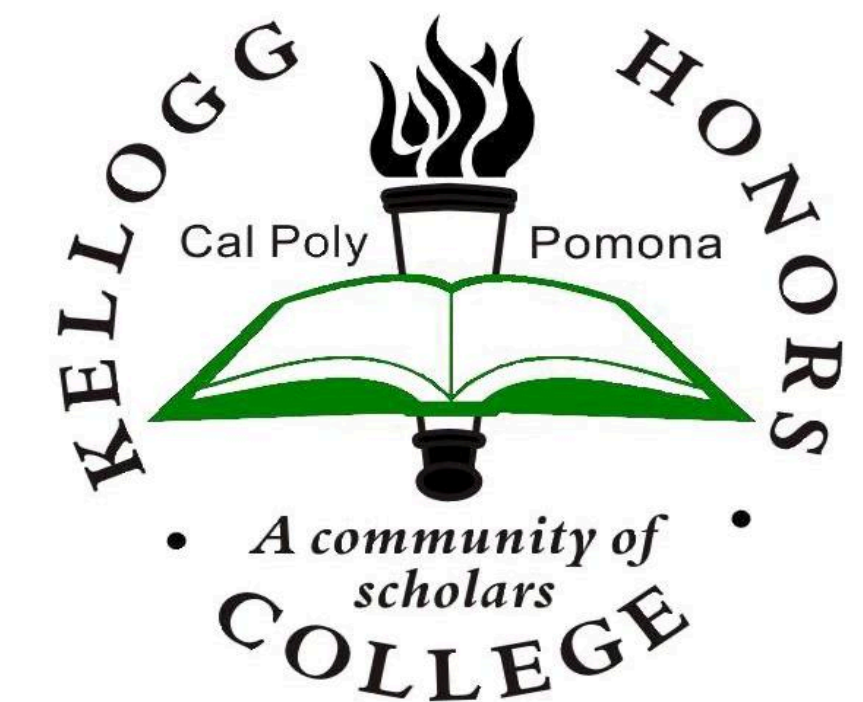


Plants 4 the People: Building Community Through Food



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Abstract: **Plants 4 the People** was born out of the idea that food has the power to bring people together. Growing up, I learned to cook from my Great Grandma Geem making her famous cheesy potatoes, and those potatoes helped create a bond between Geem and myself forever. I wanted to take that one step further and use that bond of food to help bring together my community; thus, **Plants 4 the People** started. I started a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and have partnered with a local middle school to build a community garden. At its completion, the garden will house a full outdoor classroom, 2,000 sq. ft. of planting space in raised beds, an orchard, a greenhouse, a sugarcane patch, and a fully operating hydroponics system. Our goal is to bring people together, create a fun learning environment, and have a space for everyone to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. While progress on a 20,000-square-foot lot has been slowed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been working diligently on preparations at the site to create a smooth transition into construction and be able to have a community garden when students are back on campus.

Plants 4 the People

Building Our Community

Overview

Plants 4 the People was founded as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization on the idea that food has the power to heal, educate, and connect people. Many people don't have the means or the knowledge to engage in healthy eating habits, let alone cultivate their own produce. Our mission is to educate, promote, and sustain a strong community through what is in our gardens and on our plates.

I am a chef-in-training and am motivated each day by who I can help through my work. I believe that food has the power to bring people together and empower communities. I wanted to take my knowledge and passion for food and turn it into something that is a force for change in my community; thus **Plants 4 the People** was born. As a nonprofit organization, we are working to build our first community garden where we can host workshops and events to bring together and feed our community.

Highlights

- **Plants 4 the People** was founded on June 8th, 2020 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to further education in the food and agriculture space. Our mission is simple: bring people closer to the food they eat.
- With a board of five college students who have the ambition and hunger to create something powerful, we reached out to local school sites in hopes of starting a community garden on a school site. Armed only with a few planter boxes, we were offered a 20,000-square-foot plot of land that was a former tennis court.
- We launched a GoFundMe to help cover some start-up expenses and created a website, www.plants4thepeople.org. Then, we began building our board.
- We put together a proposal and sent it off to the school district. While that was being approved, we filmed some videos of us doing a planting demonstration as well as a mission statement video to start advertising to the community who we were: <https://youtu.be/dLH4WQpFHuQ>
- We then built a few prototypes of the furniture and boxes for the garden and started working on clearing out the space to build a garden and orchard.

Present

While we hoped to be able to build the garden and launch it to the community to bring people together, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely hindered our progress. We have been able to move forward, but at a much slower pace than originally expected. However, an unexpected community has begun to be built in the meantime; a group of diverse board members with unique backgrounds coming together for a common cause.

Building a Board

As we started to embark on the journey of building a community garden, we anticipated sharing the garden with the community on the back end when it was complete. We never envisioned the community that wanted to be a part of the front end. What has become more and more apparent is that to build a community on the back end, it would be more effective to build a community on the front end. Here is a snapshot of the community we have started to build.

Alex O: Alex is a psychology major at Cal Poly Pomona. He got involved hoping to help youth disconnect from their screens and connect with the outdoor world. He believes that working in a garden is a great way to create a healthy lifestyle.

Matt J: Matt is an English and political science major from Chapman University who got involved to get experience with grant writing and crafting public relation statements. He likes that he can develop his skills while working with an organization that gives back to the community.

Jacob P: Jacob is a physics major at Cal Poly Pomona with a passion for working with youth. He hopes to help kids develop ways create positive mental health habits. Although not closely related to his major, he is excited about giving back to his community.

Florencia P: Flo is an architecture student at Cal Poly Pomona. As an immigrant, she is passionate about creating an inclusive place where people from all walks of life can gather to meet new people, get fed, and feel a part of the community.

Louis E: Louis is the small business owner of *The Plant Mon* with a background in the film industry and gardening. He has been able to bring his knowledge of both industries to produce short films about who we are and makes videos of planting demonstrations to increase our social media presence.

Eric O: Eric is the principal at Sandburg Middle School in Glendora, CA, where we are currently working on building a garden. With a passion for creating hands-on learning experiences and highlighting his students in front of the community, he has been a day-one supporter and ally of **Plants 4 the People**.

Mike T: Mike is an architecture student at Cal Poly Pomona. When he heard what we were doing, he immediately wanted to get involved and is responsible for designing of the garden (see below). His plans are what we are currently working on constructing and are what sold the school on approving this project.

Georgia R: Georgia is a high school senior who has a passion for graphic design and social media. Georgia jumped at the chance to showcase her skills and is responsible for our logo (see above) and our consistent social media presence.

Kelly D: Kelly works with a local landscaping business and, as a parent of students in the district, has been an ally and resource for landscaping the garden. She has helped with soil analysis, community outreach, and making sure the garden designs are feasible.

Community Abroad: A number of other community partners have also gotten on board early. For example, we have had calls with chefs like Food Network star Fabio Viviani and hometown gardening hero Ron Finley of the LA gardening project.

The Power of Food

In six months, **Plants 4 the People** has built a diverse community of people from all different backgrounds and professions, all united by food and a desire to help our community. Wanting to grow and feed a community has brought us together, and together we will continue to grow our community.

