

Garden grows a community - and lots of pumpkins

By GAY MACKIE

It all began with one compassionate and understanding young man who wanted free, fresh, healthy food to be available to everyone.

Thirteen years on, the Laneway Community Garden in Port Kembla covers one kilometre of previously overgrown and weed-infested land and is flourishing with a mix of organically grown fruit trees, vegetables and herbs, all available free to anyone in the community.

Co-ordinator Daniel Deighton, who started the garden in 1995, grew up in Warilla, went away to university and returned to the area, choosing to live in Port Kembla. Using his skills as a landscape architect, he began the transformation of the previous wasteland.

"My house backs onto the laneway which covers about four blocks and I began by planting some trees despite some grim warnings from neighbours that they would be ripped out by morning," he said.

"I said that if that happened, I would simply plant some more, but it didn't happen and people have a lot of respect for what we have achieved and appreciate the concept."

Since those early days the garden

is now run by a management committee and has the support of Wollongong City Council and other backers.

"Our vision is that we saw the laneway as a place for growing food, bringing people together, bringing back bushland, birds and wildlife and to making it a safe haven for everyone," Mr Deighton said.

"When I came to live in Port Kembla, the laneway was not a safe place but now it is and we want people to know that everyone is welcome here - it's about respect and caring for everyone.

"As well as growing vegetables, we are growing a community.

"It's easy to grow vegies but a lot harder to grow healthy and happy people and therefore a happy and healthy community and that's really what it is all about."

At the moment the garden includes Mediterranean fruits such as carob, olives and mulberries, sub-tropicals including mango, bananas, avocado and citrus crops and tropicals such as jackfruit, along with lettuce, sweet potato, eggplant and pumpkin and herbs such as basil, sage, thyme and marjoram.

The garden in Fifth Ave is attended each Friday between 3pm and 6pm and often on Sundays at the same time and anyone interested in



Co-ordinator of the Laneway Community Garden in Port Kembla Daniel Deighton (centre) with a wheelbarrow full of pumpkins which will be turned into delicious food for a Pumpkin Party. Also pictured are garden workers (left) Todd Cleary, Bill Wilson, Nigel Slater, Brent Kelly, Angelo Gaudiosi (head chef of Port Kembla Community Project) and Romeo Tatangelo.

Picture: SYLVIA LIBER

having a look around or giving a hand would be most welcome.

"We want to demonstrate that public land and public open space can be used for food security," Mr Deighton said.

"In the future we won't be able to rely on bringing in food from the other side of the planet, especially with climate change, global warming and fuel prices, so we will have to

start growing food in the local community," he said.

"Our aim is to provide free organic seasonal produce for the community, to encourage people to eat healthy foods and to relearn the skills we will need in the future to grow our own food."

Pumpkins have been harvested recently and will be the basis for a Pumpkin Party in the garden on

Sunday. Various households nearby have taken on the task of turning the fresh produce into pumpkin soup, scones, biscuits, flans and pies, which will be served to everyone who goes along on the day.

"We are really looking forward to the day and hope it will become an annual Pumpkin Harvest Festival celebrating everything that is good about fresh food," Mr Deighton said.