

# OVF NEWS



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Karen Andersen, Editor

## *From the Editor's desk*

I am thrilled that a new year has arrived! My lettuce seeds have transformed into small colorful leaves to accompany my salads, and when I'm not looking, the aphids are enjoying my broccoli a little more than I'd prefer. Perhaps the wrath of several sprays of water will send them packing to another dimension.

The advent of a new year inevitably includes a personal examination of what I've achieved and what dreams I'd like to activate next. Although I often fear change, cling to my familiar patterns, and remain stuck (ensuring that my dreams do not manifest), I am forced to realize once again that transformation offers the only path to personal evolution. I encourage you to allow change to move you, just as the moon spurs the tides into action. May this New Year bring all of us many blessings and joyful encounters.

For those of you interested in attending the next Master Gardener Volunteer Training Program, the application deadline of February 15, 2004 is fast approaching. Call Gloria Mitchell at 323 260-3348 or the Common Ground Garden Program office at 323 838-4540 to request an application or log on to <http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/>. The course runs from March 6 through May 8, 2004 and meets every Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The fee is \$75.

Our feature article inside describes the grueling labor that contributes to the Caesar salad you enjoy while dining at the Cheesecake Factory. It's a complex saga beginning when lettuce seeds are planted and takes you through the laborious harvesting of the lettuce before it finds its way through the distribution chain to your favorite restaurant. Reading the article,

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## THE TREE TEAM NEEDS YOU



Not many gardeners realize that we have 223 trees at Ocean View Farms, and all of them require annual pruning, fertilizing and spraying to ensure their continued health and fertility.

In the orchard near the composting area there are peach, apricot plum and pomegranate trees. The driveway is bordered by richly fruiting avocados. A huge fig tree overhangs the big shed. Persimmon and a wide variety of apple trees beautify many independent projects. Orange, lemon, lime and tangerine trees create a windbreak and noise hedge along Centinela. They all require care, feeding and attention throughout the year.

### **That's where you come in.**

The OVF Tree Team needs dedicated volunteers. Beginning in January each year the Tree Team starts pruning the fruit trees before they leaf out, essential for a good fruit harvest. Then the team moves on to prune other trees

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## *Saturday, February 14th*

Community Workday 9:00 • Potluck 12:00 • General Meeting 1:00

# GardenMaster's Report

## WELCOME NEW AND OLD – STILL-YOUNG GARDENERS, AND 2004

Renewal time has arrived. Check your mail for your renewal notice and please verify data on your profile sheet to make sure it is accurate and up to date. Indicate any changes on your profile sheet and mail it with your renewal check through the U.S. Post Office. Membership fees are due by January 31. A late fee of \$10 will be added between February 1 through February 10. If your check is not received by February 11, your plot will be reassigned.

**TOOLS** Please buy your own basic gardening tools, shovel, hoe, trowel. If you borrow tools from the shed you are required to print your name, phase and plot number on the sign out sheet. Tools must be returned to the shed on the same day as they are borrowed. No exceptions! Pitchforks cost a whopping \$30 each and are suitable only for picking up manure and/or compost. They are not suited for digging weeds. Why? Because the fork necks bend, and the handles bend or break.

**PLOT USAGE** Plots are for growing and nurturing flowers and vegetables. Plots are not to be used as a storage area for items of furniture, e.g., cabinets, tables, etc. Plots are not to be enclosed wholly or partially with trellis walls. Secluded clubhouses are not allowed. Gatherings are allowed in OVF's meeting areas.

**TREE PRUNING** A professional tree pruner has been hired to prune OVF's large trees. Joan Silver's crew will prune OVF's fruit trees. Never, never, never take it upon yourself to prune a tree.

**FENCES** Fences are not allowed around a plot regardless of desire or material.

**RETAINING WALLS** Read the rules and regulations. Talk with your Phase Rep. Construct retaining walls of 2" materials. Support same with pipe driven into the ground. **Be careful to stay above the underground water pipes.** Underground water pipes are in a direct line with the hose bibs. Walls are not to be higher than functionally necessary (refer to Rules and Regulations).

**HOSE POSTS** All hose post locations are identified with a pink label attached to the post. Plumbing or hose repair work orders must have the correct identification.

**MAILBOXES** Name and plot number written on your mailbox is necessary because the mailbox repairman said: "It takes longer to find your plot than it does to repair your post or your mailbox!"

May 2004 be filled with energy, beauty, kindness, cooperation, and...healthy veggies.

*Ed Mosman, Gardenmaster*

## OVF FAREWELLS

Sy Joseph has left the garden to care for his ill wife. He has moved to San Dimas. Sy was a member for many years and we will miss his many contributions on behalf of OVF. Daisy Teruya's husband, Tommy, passed away recently. Several members from the garden attended his funeral service. We extend our heartfelt sympathy to Daisy during this difficult time.

### ...the Tree Team

until May, when it's time to fertilize. In June, it's time to spray. Citrus trees are pruned in late summer. And weeding takes place—you guessed it—pretty much all year round.

Not sure how to prune anything taller than a tomato vine? No worries. We're building a crack Tree Team at OVF and if you're interested we've arranged for volunteers to attend a special, highly-informative seminar given by Los Angeles' Tree People that will bring you up to speed, pronto.

Trees at OVF are often taken for granted as we scratch away at our small fiefdoms of dirt. Yet their magnificent presence feeds us in countless ways. Join the OVF Tree Team today! Start logging your 2004 community hours now among the green giants.

Leave a note with your name, plot, and telephone number in Garden Chair, Joan Silver's, mailbox in the Small Shed to let her know you're interested. The Tree Team meets in the Big Shed every Saturday at 10:00 a.m. See you then!!

### ... the Editor's Desk

you'll discover yet another reason to savor the fresh lettuce we grow here at OVF, while not contributing to the exploitation of our day laborers.

OVF enjoyed another fantastically successful Arts & Crafts Sale on December 13th. A big Thank You to all who brought items for sale and to those volunteers who assisted affixing price tags. Most of all, we thank our wonderful members who purchased Christmas gifts! We raised around \$960, and will notify you at a later date how the funds will be utilized to benefit our community garden.

Happy Gardening!

*Karen Andersen, editor*

# HARVEST

# OF PAIN

## THE LONG, HARD JOURNEY FROM CENTRAL VALLEY SEED TO CAESAR SALAD

*Excerpted from a long, very detailed article written for the LA Weekly by Vince Beiser. It ran in the November 28, 2003 issue.*

I'm staring at my Cheesecake Factory Caesar salad, disconcerted. I can't help but think how Abelardo Romo is into his eighth hour of stooping over and hacking away at lettuce heads in a pesticide-drenched field near Salinas. Soon, he'll head back to his steel cot in a Spartan labor camp hundreds of miles from his wife and children. Around the same time, Israel Gomez Ruiz will be returning to his tiny, unheated shack in a muddy field outside of Gilroy – if he's found work in the fields at all today.

Nearly half of the world's romaine salads originate in a small, bare building crammed with sleek high-tech equipment on the outskirts of Gilroy, the California farming town best known for its garlic. This is the biotech research laboratory of Central Valley Seeds Inc. CVS keeps a database of the DNA "fingerprints" of all of its patented varieties, and frequently checks the DNA of competitors' lettuce to see if they've illegally used CVS's seeds or even crossed them with another variety.

Salinas-based D'Arrigo Bros. is one of the state's leading lettuce growers and the one that supplies the Cheesecake Factory's romaine. California grows more than half of all the produce eaten in America and very little of that comes from the small, family-run American farm of enduring national myth. Agriculture is increasingly an enterprise run by large corporations on ever larger megafarms. D'Arrigo Bros. is a bit of an oddity in the industry in that it is still a family-run business which began in 1924. Their fields are cut through with perfectly straight rows of virtually identical heads growing so densely together they almost look like a single, solid band of rippling green. Lines of men bent double scuttle along the rows in trios. The lead two briskly chop the lettuce heads from the ground at the root with a triangular knife and stack them upside-down for the packer, who crams them into pink and white cartons bearing the Andy Boy logo. It is, literally, stoop labor, relentlessly physical. There is built in pressure to keep moving as quickly as possible since the entire crew's pay depends in part on how many cartons it produces.

The field left in the harvest's wake looks as though it was the scene of some epic battle between lettuce armies, carpeted with broken leaves and strewn with imperfect, rejected heads.

After lettuce is harvested it is packed into cartons and trucked to a giant refrigerating chamber in the D'Arrigo Bros. cooling facility. After cooling, the pallets are forklifted into a cavernous warehouse building known as a "cold box," where the temperature is just above freezing. D'Arrigo Bros. doesn't keep their lettuce heads there longer than three days to maintain freshness. A refrigerated truck backed right up to a door built into the wall of the cold box and was loaded in under an hour and then delivered the cartons of romaine to a Sysco warehouse on the outskirts of Los Angeles. During the night shift, workers would have loaded the cartons onto a Sysco truck for delivery to restaurants around the city.

Alejandro Garcia is one of the hundreds of people who make a living harvesting such lettuces for D'Arrigo Bros. Garcia, 39, is a small, slightly stooped man with a broad, mustached face and calm eyes. He was born in Michoacan, Mexico, but moved to Santa Maria, California, with his family when he was 5. When he was 17, about the time Margaret D'Arrigo was getting ready to go off to college at the University of California at Davis, Garcia got married and soon had his first daughter. Fatherhood impelled him out of high school and into work in the fields. He moved to Salinas in 1994, got a job with D'Arrigo Bros., and has been cutting their lettuce ever since. "You get home, and all you want to do is rest," says Garcia that night, sitting in his kitchen, which is lit by a single bare bulb. "Then the alarm clock goes off in the morning, and you're just as tired." His back often hurts from all the hours bent over. "This year, I don't know why, but I've been coming out real tired," he says. "Maybe it's my body telling me I've gotta find another job."

Farm work today is like an outdoor version of the sweatshop factories of a century ago: most of the laborers are immigrants, few have union representation, and the work is poorly paid, physically strenuous and startlingly dangerous. Since Cesar Chavez launched a national lettuce boycott 33 years ago, there have been some gains – some workers are now represented by the United Farm Workers, and more have health insurance and other benefits – but agricultural work remains one of the lowest paid yet highest-risk occupations in America.

The D'Arrigo Bros. fieldworker who cut my romaine head was earning, like all D'Arrigo fieldworkers, at least \$7.05 an hour – slightly higher than the legal minimum. But in some crops workers can earn more if their crew produces above a quota of cartons. When I met him in May, Garcia had pulled in \$535 from the previous week, but that was the height of the season; often, his wages drop down to more like \$350, which is all his wife made that week. The couple has

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## Harvest of Pain, page 3...

no savings to speak of, and no pension.

With his meager apartment and few hundred bucks a week income, Garcia is actually among the elite of lettuce harvesters, and indeed of fieldworkers nationwide. D'Arrigo Bros. pays relatively well, by the industry's standards, and the work lasts most of the year. "Five hundred dollars a week is definitely on the high end of the scale," says Efrain Lara, a UFW organizer and former D'Arrigo fieldworker. According to the federal Labor Department, average farm worker wages dropped during the 1990s. Most farm workers are unemployed for months at a stretch, and if they're not citizens, they get no unemployment benefits. The median income for farm workers nationwide is just \$7,500 a year.

Worse, many don't even get paid what they're owed. Cheating workers is rampant in the industry. One spring afternoon in the parking lot of a FoodsCo grocery store in Salinas, a popular pickup point for fieldworkers, Moises Hernandez, 21, told me he was working six days a week cutting lettuce for various employers. Theoretically, he was earning between \$250 and \$300 a week. But several growers' checks had bounced, and he was still waiting for payment from two others. Unscrupulous growers can easily shift the blame onto middleman contractors and as Human Rights Watch stated in a 2000 report, "It is not unusual for farm labor contractors to evade responsibility for violations by closing down operations, only to later resume under a different name."

Kix Nystrom, the Cheesecake Factory vice president who oversees produce procurement, bristled a bit when I asked whether the company had any kind of policies setting worker-treatment standards for their contractors, the way some companies do for their contractors in sneaker factories in Indonesia. "We deal with reputable companies," he said. "It's hard work, but I think the workers get paid well for what they do." "Paid well" is a relative concept, however. Out amid the fields south of Salinas is a collection of single-story unheated wooden barracks surrounded by a barbed wire topped fence that is called Toro Camp.

Abelardo Romo, a 42 year old migrant worker originally from Sinaloa, Mexico, pays \$86 a week to stay here, sleeping on a thin mattress on a metal bedstead in a room with four other men. Romo, a professional looking guy with glasses and a thoughtful air, leaves his wife and two daughters in El Centro every year to come up to Salinas for the season to cut lettuce for River Ranch, a big grower. Every couple of weeks, he gets in his mud-spattered old Dodge, its left tail-light held in place with duct tape, and makes the trip home to visit his family. "I think very much about my family, but I can't do anything else," he says. "The pay is very low down there."

Back at the Cheesecake Factory, I ordered an appetizer size salad. Somebody like Alejandro Garcia stooped over to cut this lettuce head, working fast in the hope of earning an extra dollar an hour. Perhaps someone like Abelardo Romo left his wife and children for months so that I could eat this salad. I try not to think about them. I start eating. . . I feel responsible for wasting this fistful of romaine left on my plate. All the work that went into getting those leaves here - only to have them thrown out? It seems wrong. Especially since I know what made it possible for this lettuce to be cheap enough for the Cheesecake Factory to dole out such ludicrously oversized portions. I'm paying \$7.95 for this salad, but other people are picking up the rest of the unseen tab."

### **The Best Cutting Roses** per Master Gardener Yvonne Savio:

- \* **RED:** Mr. Lincoln, Olympiad, Viva
- \* **PINK:** America, Bewitched, Cherish, Color Magic, Duet, Sonia, Touch of Class, Voodoo
- \* **PURPLE:** Deep Purple, Intrigue, Paradise
- \* **WHITE:** French Lace, Honor, Iceberg, Pascali
- \* **ORANGE:** Gingersnap, Marina, Prominent
- \* **YELLOW:** Gold Medal, New Day, Summer Sunshine

## **JANUARY- MARCH WORKDAY SCHEDULE**

### **JANUARY**

10 Sat 9-12 Work  
17 Sat 9:30 Board Mtg.  
25 Sun 1-4 Work

### **FEBRUARY**

14 Sat 9-12 Work  
12 Potluck  
1 Gen. Mtg.  
29 Sun 1-4 Work

### **MARCH**

13 Sat 9-12 Work  
20 Sat 9:30 Board Mtg.  
28 Sun 1-4 Work

**WEATHER'S  
STILL COOL!  
TIME TO GET  
YOUR HOURS  
IN NOW.**

*You may  
be capable  
of great things,  
But life consists  
of small things.*

*Daily Tao*

