

# Island Beacon: Volunteer Time Brothers' Gardens of Hope provide food, hope to those in need

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**Mike Johnson (left) with one of the volunteers.**

Meet the Johnson Brothers of Grosse Ile. They are year round urban gardeners, educators and volunteers. They help feed people in need. Many older retired men call up a friend or a brother and spend a day playing golf. The Johnson brothers instead started an exceptional project: Grosse Ile Gardens of Hope.

“We spent our early years during the summer on the family farm on Grosse Ile’s Macomb Street which dates back to 1850,” Mike Johnson said. “It is located on the south side of Macomb from Parke Lane on the East to Meridian on the West. The farmhouse is still there.”

The younger brother, Mike worked as a businessman and lawyer. He had a health situation that made him think seriously about how he should use his remaining years. Older brother Bob has been a science teacher and is a master gardener. Bob came up with the idea.

“The Gardens of Hope are an Urban Agricultural site for education, participation and feeding those in need.” Bob Johnson said.

G.I. Gardens of Hope is on a farm at Westcroft Gardens, located at 21803 West River Road on Grosse Ile, which is the well-known oldest farm in Michigan, owned by the same family for seven generations. Denise de Beausset is the current president of the business. All partners want to make sure this farm continues service for a very long time.

At the present time there is no posted sign for Gardens of Hope. When you drive off West River Road into Westcroft Gardens, you will catch a glimpse of the high tunnels/hoop houses where the salad and root vegetables and herbs are grown. They do the year round gardening in 'hoop houses', also called 'high tunnel' gardens. Students with special needs are brought in from the Lincoln Center in Wyandotte to observe, learn and [help](#). Other "students" young and old are encouraged to join the Gardens.

"I see Gardens of Hope as a way to build a model for agriculture that can inspire local schools and students." Bob Johnson said.

These young people are learning gardening from the ground up. This craft will help them grow and eat well for years. They and volunteers help supply food for people in need and learn gardening skills.

The Gibraltar Food Pantry and Grosse Ile Seniors are two locations that feed many from food they receive from G.I. Gardens of Hope.

How can you help? They need volunteers for planning, construction, planting, weeding, watering, crop-production, picking and packaging the produce.

"Volunteering can be fun only if a volunteer loves the satisfaction of giving and maybe teaching, and providing for others in need. Also helps in the field if you don't mind dirt under your nails." Mike said.

Volunteers may set their own schedule and take home a portion of the crops as available.

Donations to The Grosse Ile Gardens of Hope would be welcomed. The Grosse Ile Rotary has made a much needed contribution just this past December.

The Grosse Ile Gardens of Hope phone number is (727) 430-8352, and more information can be found on their Facebook page, just look up Grosse Ile Gardens of Hope.