



# The constant gardener

Through the nonprofit she founded, Robin Emmons serves those who live in 'urban food deserts'

BY CONSTANCE BROSSA

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**Robin Emmons**

PHOTOS BY TIONA FULLER PHOTOGRAPHY

**N**o less than 10 miles from Robin Emmons' personal garden in Huntersville lies a 4-acre site where a new model of urban sustainability will be nurtured.

By early April, Emmons expects work to begin on an urban farm site unlike any other in the Charlotte area. The plan is for the site, at 3416 Sunset Road, to offer everything from organic produce, eggs and honey procured from three beehives. The organization will incorporate onsite, plus cooking demonstrations and a food co-op that allows families to use food stamps. It is expected to be in full production by summer.

The farm site is the latest initiative on which Sow Much Good – the Charlotte-based nonprofit that Emmons founded – has embarked. It is the product of a partnership

between Sow Much Good and Martin Marietta Materials, which operates quarries in the Charlotte area.

“We have been extremely fortunate,” says Emmons. “They basically gave us the land (in the form of a long-term, tenured lease). We are in partnership with them ... We think of it (the partnership)” as an opportunity “to craft a model that is scalable” and can be taken to other neighborhoods.

The farm site is near the Oakdale community and the Peachtree neighborhood, which are predominantly African American. It is the latest incarnation of Sow Much Good’s mission, according to its website, “provide equal access to organic food sources; to inspire individuals to take charge of their health; and to promote healthy lifestyles through food and nutrition.”

Since its inception, Sow Much Good has served people in so-called “urban food deserts” (where healthy, affordable food is hard to obtain) through its “farm stand model,” with locations at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church on Beatties Ford Road, Redeemer Lutheran Church on Ashley Road and the Betty Rae Thomas Recreation Center on Tuckaseegee Road.

Now, the urban farm site and another 4-acre site in Huntersville will be Sow Much Good’s centers of activities.



As executive director of Sow Much Good, Emmons is heavily involved in various aspects of the influential and well-respected nonprofit's operations. Regardless, she still tends to the quarter-acre garden at her home where she and her husband, Willie Emmons, reside. During the growing season, her garden produces 3,000 pounds of produce including carrots, radish, spinach, lettuce, herbs, strawberries, squash, zucchini and turnips. Not bad for a Boston native who grew up in a three-story house in Roxbury with barely enough room to grow tomatoes in the front yard. She's been a vegetarian for two decades.

It's been five years since Emmons' resignation from a business-analyst job at Bank of America (spurred by "a crisis of values," she says) and a life-threatening health crisis involving her brother, which ultimately led to the creation of Sow Much Good. Since then, Sow Much Good has garnered the attention of national media outlets, a collection of corporate and individual donors, and a team of 120 volunteers who do everything from weeding, harvesting, planting, packaging and transporting food to participating in community events. Among the nonprofit's most visible accomplishments are the two tons of organic fruits and vegetables it has donated to food assistance programs. Perhaps less quantifiable – but no less significant – is the organization's ability to change

people’s behaviors through education and direct interaction. “We really believe in connection and cultivating relationships with people to give them strategies,” says Emmons, a graduate of UNC Charlotte. That includes everything from teaching people “how to prepare collard greens without cooking them to death” to “teaching people how to grow (produce) in whatever spaces they have.”

Want to donate to, or volunteer with, Sow Much Good? Visit [www.sowmuchgood.org](http://www.sowmuchgood.org).

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