

Cardinal Cushing Centers CONNECTOR



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Fall 2025



Corn is one of the many fruits and vegetables grown in the Cushing garden by Patrick Bradbury and other students.

Cushing's garden grows

By MEAGHAN CASEY

From bountiful harvests to new expansions, Cushing's garden continues to grow — in more ways than one.

"It's an amazing progression," said instructor Susan Svelnis. "It's expanded every year and we're really seeing the growth of both the garden and the students."

The greenhouse and garden are producing more than ever, and the new Garden Shop, which opened in late July, is the perfect space for the public to buy fresh produce, herbs, cut flowers, house plants, handmade woodshop items and unique garden décor. In addition to serving the community, it has become another vocational learning space for students.

"Students are labeling and watering plants, learning to use the register and handle payments, arranging flowers, sorting through produce and transporting produce to the café," said Eleanor Arpino, Cushing's sustainability coordinator.

The shop, located within the MarketPlace, is currently open Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Because it is seasonal, hours will vary based on what is harvested, as well as on special events, holidays and the school calendar.

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Youth movement comes to Cushing

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Cushing has welcomed some younger faces this fall, with the opening of two early elementary classrooms.

The classrooms, serving students ages 6-10, are located in Hanover, but the plan is to create space for a younger cohort of students when the St. Coletta Day School in Braintree reopens.

"We're seeing a higher number of kids at a younger age needing support," said Meghan Byrne, Cushing's associate vice president of marketing and admissions. "Districts are sending more referrals, and more families are asking about services. We're looking to

provide high-level instructional learning as they move into that 14+ age range — whether they stay with us or move back to their district."

Students have academic readiness time in the classroom, as well as practice in gross motor skills in the gym and on the playground and track. Goals are set for each Individualized Education Program (IEP) and services such as physical therapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy are part of the day. Each classroom has five students, one teacher and two teaching assistants, which Byrne says is an ideal ratio.

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Theo Duong is one of the younger students at Cushing this fall.

PHOTO BY KATIE MORRISON

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Cushing grows with the help of others



**MICHELLE
MARKOWITZ**

This is such an exciting time for Cardinal Cushing Centers as we are seeing so much growth —within our garden and grounds, our volunteer base and even the age range of the individuals we serve.

This fall, we opened new classrooms for students as young as 6 years old, and it has been wonderful to begin providing services to these young students.

They bring so much joy to all of us here in Hanover, and I can't wait to see what exciting things are in store for them when our new and improved Braintree campus reopens.

Our garden has also seen so much growth in terms of the volume of flowers, fruit and vegetables that have been enjoyed by the community, our students and residents and patrons of our café. The new Garden Shop was something we were all anticipating and I'm so thankful to the volunteers and different departments that came together to make it happen.

Many companies sent their employees to help turn that space into the beautiful shop that it is, and our greenhouse and woodworking

students have put in so much extra effort to make it a success. In August, we hosted our first farm-to-table dinner and it was a magical evening. I was so lucky to join friends and supporters in the beauty of the garden and enjoy the delicious meal prepared by our staff and students. I hope we're able to host more events like this in the future.

Thank you to all who came out this year to participate in our golf tournament, and I hope to see many of you at our Fun Run and Harvest Festival coming up later this month.

Michelle Markowitz is president & CEO of Cardinal Cushing Centers.

BOARD PROFILE

Kroha happy to land on Cushing board

Since joining the Cushing board two years ago, attorney Kim Kroha has been inspired by what she has seen.

"I've really enjoyed how good of a feeling it is," said Kroha. "Being there and seeing the care they give the students and the overall community feels joyful."

Kroha is a partner at the Quincy-based law firm Baker, Braverman & Barbadoro, P.C., and counsels clients in land use/development/licensing, and real estate-related litigation.

"I didn't realize how many buildings Cushing had, and as a land use attorney, that's an area where I can help," she said. "Cushing is really looking to the future, asking 'what makes sense' and 'how do we accomplish that?' Their thoughtful designs and improvements are really impressive."

Kroha was invited onto the board after

meeting Cushing President and CEO Michelle Markowitz through Leadership South Shore — a program that brings emerging and established leaders through a year-long immersive learning curriculum, inspiring them to make positive changes in the region.

A Braintree resident, Kroha also serves as chair of the Braintree Planning Board and a member of the Braintree Chamber of Commerce. She and her husband have two children.

As a litigator, Kroha represents clients in Land Court and Superior Court, before the Housing Appeals Committee, and before local boards in the South Shore. She was named a Rising Star by Super Lawyers in 2021 and 2022 in the Land Use category and was honored as one of the Top Women in Law by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly

in 2022. She was named partner at her firm two years ago.

Kroha got her start in commercial real estate while studying finance at Florida Atlantic University and has more than 10 years' experience as project and leasing manager for a commercial real estate company. She graduated as valedictorian of her evening class at New England Law and spent time as a judicial law clerk before joining Baker, Braverman & Barbadoro in 2016.



Kim Kroha



Cushing's St. Coletta Classic golf tournament raised more than \$142,000, thanks to an incredible partnership with Rockland Trust, generous sponsors, and all of the players who showed up to support people with intellectual disabilities.

Cushing garden and greenhouse are growing

GARDEN from page 1

Many volunteer groups had a hand in decorating the shop, both inside and out, and Cushing’s industrial arts students were instrumental in creating beautiful signage for the new space.

“We’ve seen an incredible customer base,” said Arpino. “Some people are getting their produce almost daily.”

The garden has been producing kale, arugula, lettuce, eggplant, onions, peppers, tomatoes, summer squash, watermelon, cucumber, corn, sweet potatoes, gourds, garlic, herbs and more. Right now, pumpkins and mums are also available thanks to a partnership with a local farm, and fresh cut flowers will be offered until the first frost. In the winter, holiday trees and wreaths will become available.

Cushing relies on the help of its students to tend to the garden year-round, as well as individuals and groups that come in for projects like weeding or putting up trellises.

“It’s unbelievable the help we’ve gotten this year,” said Svelnis. “And for the students, it’s a great learning experience. We’ve seen tremendous improvement in the students following tasks. Many have taken ownership of particular crops and tasks, and several students can even plant and harvest by themselves now.”

Students are also enjoying the fruits — and vegetables — of their labor.

“They’re learning about healthy living and understanding the difference between processed foods and homegrown,” said Svelnis. “It’s fun teaching them how to grow and then letting them sample it.”

Fresh herbs and vegetables are also available to individuals in Cushing’s residential houses and the Cushing Café uses a lot of the vegetables in its sandwiches and soups.

“If they can’t use it right away, they’ll freeze it,” said Svelnis. “Nothing goes to waste.”

This year, two of the adult residential houses got planters and grew vegetables, herbs and flowers of their own, using seedlings grown by students in the greenhouse.

At the end of August, Cushing hosted a farm-to-table dinner, set up in the garden, for donors and other special guests.

“It was really spectacular,” said Arpino. “The table was set with flowers from the garden and we had passed appetizers and a three-course, family-style meal using ingredients that we grew right there. Students were grilling the vegetables and chicken and a couple of graduates helped serve.”

Since the ground area to plant is nearly at capacity, Arpino says garden planning and continued improvement will be the goal for the coming year. “We want to focus on maximizing and optimizing the space and what we’re growing to increase yield, and maybe stagger the planting of select vegetables to extend the harvesting seasons,” she said.



- 1) Ainsley DiTomaso is proud of the watermelon she harvested from the garden.
- 2) James Tamblyn shows off a cantaloupe he picked.
- 3) Guests enjoy a farm-to-table dinner.
- 4) The new Garden Shop is open for business.
- 5) Moriah Winchell enjoys freshly picked corn.
- 6) Owen Putlack shows President and CEO Michelle Markowitz plants in the greenhouse.

Lending a hand for Cushing

By MEAGHAN CASEY

The importance of Cushing’s volunteers cannot be overstated. Throughout the year, they can be seen supporting staff in programs for students and adults; assisting in the MarketPlace shops; helping with maintenance and landscaping; coaching athletic teams; or assisting with skills such as music or cooking.

Opportunities to volunteer are open to individuals as well as corporate groups. As Cushing opened its new Garden Shop, funded through grant money and private donations, the shop, greenhouse and garden received much needed extra support from volunteers from Morgan Stanley (photo 2), Voya (3), SHP Financial (4), State Street (5), Rockland Recovery Group (6), Linden Ponds (7) and Liberty Mutual (9). Volunteers painted, prepped, weeded, planted, mulched and more.

Elsewhere in the MarketPlace, a team from Arbella Insurance (1) came in to unpack and organize products in Take 2 and Unique Boutique, and many other groups, including North River Church (8) have given their time and service.



Cushing welcomes younger cohort to Hanover

YOUNGER from page 1

“There’s so much one-on-one support, but they’re also practicing skills within a group dynamic, whether that’s cooperating or waiting their turn,” she said.

The classroom groupings were carefully thought out, and families have been able to meet the teachers and other families during an open house, which Byrne says is another step in building a sense of community for the students.

When St. Coletta reopens, Byrne is hoping the school will be able to serve students ages 6-14, with the option of bringing them to Hanover for art or vocational services.

“We’re really excited and hoping to build out that cohort,” she said. “There’s a different energy the younger students bring, and everyone seems to enjoy it.”



Students in the younger classrooms include Savannah Joy, top, Owen Kuras, left, Brayden Chambers and Nora Coveney.



Parent pays it forward with estate gift



Martin Kriensky, parent of a graduate, has included Cushing in his estate planning.

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

When Martin Kriensky found a spot for his son, David, at Cardinal Cushing Centers, it was one of the best decisions for their family.

Now, Kriensky is paying it forward and bequeathing 30 percent of his assets to Cushing when he passes. He is one of a growing number of people looking to make a significant gift to Cushing through estate planning.

“Cushing did wonders for my son,” said Kriensky. “I’ve had a wonderful, happy, 30-year marriage that I might not have had without Cardinal Cushing Centers and I thank them for that. If someone treats me well, I never forget it, and Cushing opened doors for me that wouldn’t have been. It was the best thing for us and for David.”

David, 53, has tuberous sclerosis complex, a rare genetic disorder that causes non-cancerous tumors to grow in vital organs, including the brain. It often results in cognitive, behavioral and developmental issues. David started at Cushing as a residential student in his late teens, in 1989, around the time Kriensky met his second wife, Patricia. They married in 1995. David remained at Cushing until he was 22 and accepted into a then-experimental program in group home living through Brockton Area Multi-Services Inc.

“He really turned the corner at Cushing,” said

Kriensky. “He was better off with his peers and people who were able to help him, and they were spectacular. They did wonders for him, and helped him to become functional. I remember he worked in the kitchen and sold Christmas trees, and he developed a work ethic that today he still has. It was just a good program, and I wish he had stayed on in the Cushing system through adulthood.”

David is living in a group home in Brockton and working in the bakery department at BJ’s Wholesale Club. Kriensky, who retired from a career in finance, has moved to Ogunquit, Maine and has picked up new work as a firefighter and substitute teacher. In addition to David, Kriensky has a daughter, Michelle, who owns her own hair salon.

“David and Michelle will be taken care of, but I wanted to make a significant donation to Cushing as well,” said Kriensky. “It’s dependent on the market, but hopefully it will be close to a half-million dollars.”

Bequests like Kriensky’s are often a preferred means of gift giving, offering flexibility for individuals to retain use of their assets, and make changes at any time. Donors can name a specific amount of cash, all or a percentage of their estate after expenses, or property such as real estate or securities.

To learn more about the many ways to give, contact Laurie Maranian, Director of Development, at lmarianian@cushingcenters.org or call (781) 829-1247.



Cushing is gearing up for its third annual Fun Run on **Saturday, October 25**. The Halloween-themed event is a fun, easy, one-mile walk or run for all ages and abilities, followed by a harvest festival at the finish line. Check-in and a pre-race party begins at **10 a.m.** at Cushing, **405 Washington St., Hanover**. Last year’s event raised \$72,000 for the students and adults that Cushing supports. Hundreds of participants and their families arrived in costume and enjoyed the spirited festivities, including music, raffles and costume contests. To donate or register, go to **www.cushingfunrun.org**.



Cushing benefits from Eagle Scout’s honor

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Cushing students and adults are enjoying a new sensory path, thanks to the efforts of Eagle Scout Joe Hamblin, a member of Troop 49 in Kingston. Hamblin, whose mother, Jane, works at Cushing, has been giving back to the organization over the years — building a compost bin with his troop a few years ago and cleaning the ropes course last spring. To become an Eagle Scout, he had to complete a mandatory leadership and service project benefiting a community institution. When it came time to choose a benefactor for his project, he wanted it to be Cushing.

“Joey always knew about Cardinal Cushing and the population that we serve, even before he could talk,” said Jane. She said he thought about some ideas like adding tables or benches or maybe another compost bin, but he wanted to do something more impactful. “We talked about something more for the kids to do outside during their free time, and the idea of an outdoor sensory path came to be,” she said. “I wanted my Eagle Scout project at Cardinal Cushing to give the opportunity for the students to experience things through sensory, and to have a place to relax, during their leisure time,” said Joe. “I enjoy working with my hands, and seeing the hard work from myself and the troop benefit others.

It feels good to give back.” Once the project was approved, he consulted with Cushing’s occupational therapy and maintenance departments. It was necessary to come up with different textures, visuals and weather-proof items, and the area needed to be prepped before the path could be installed. “The maintenance team was very helpful in deciding a good area, and prepping the grounds,” said Jane. “Luckily the weather cooperated, and with a lot of help from his fellow troop members, the path was successfully installed. Joe is hoping this Eagle project is enjoyed by many for years to come.”



Eagle Scout Joe Hamblin (orange shirt) and his troop build a sensory path for the Cushing community.

ALUMNI PROFILE

Life on the farm suits Schleicher

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

If Cushing alumna Courtney Schleicher could be anywhere, it would be on a farm or out on the water. Luckily, in Yarmouth, Maine, she can have both.

Schleicher, 34, lives on her family's coastal property, which includes dozens of acres of farmland.

"She really enjoys taking care of and feeding all the animals — the sheep, goats, ducks, chickens and horses," said her private nanny, Christine Howe. "We'll gather the wool and the eggs, and she also does a lot of work in the garden, harvesting cucumbers, squash, tomatoes and pumpkins. It's teaching her responsibility. She enjoys getting up and going out to the animals. The horse that she rides was an abused animal and he's very gentle with her. She'll feed him and brush him and he'll kiss her on the nose. She loves going out to the barn to see him."

Schleicher was a residential student at Cushing and enjoyed cheerleading and softball during her time there. She was connected to Howe, who was a group home manager at Cushing, and they both moved to Yarmouth in 2019. Schleicher's late grandfather, Jim Gorman, was the grandson of L.L. Bean, and her grandmother, Maureen, and mother, Barbara, are still living on the property. Schleicher is able to live in her own residence, with the assistance of Howe.

"She loves fishing and going out on the boat and spending time with her family," said Howe. "She's always so happy. When she walks into a room, she just lights it up. She talks a lot, and loves to bake and cook and be in the kitchen. She's like another kid to me, and my own kids love her like a sister."

Howe still works with Schleicher on handwriting and communication, but she describes her as "smart as a whip."

"She teaches me something new every day," she said.

