

# The Herald-Times

## Rooftop garden feeds Middle Way House residents

Posted: Friday, June 28, 2013 12:15 am  
Andi's Maiden Name is Jobe



Andi Jobe walks on the rooftop garden at the Middle Way House.  
Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times



You can't see it from South Washington Street, or even from Waldron, Hill and Buskirk Park across the street, but tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, melons, herbs and more are growing on top of the roof of the old Coca-Cola building, now part of Middle Way House's New Wings project.

Sisters Andi and Lauren Jobe are coordinator and intern, respectively, with Middle Way House, and oversee the vegetable production, working with other volunteers.

The roof is covered with a black waterproof rubber mat that absorbs heat, so the air temperature at the garden has reached 140 degrees — less than ideal for cool-weather crops such as salad greens, but with adequate water, just fine for heat-loving plants such as tomatoes and basil.

The soil and living, breathing plants provide insulation, helping to cool the roof and the interior of the building.

Water is plentiful up there. Even during last year's drought, the garden didn't use a drop of water from the City of Bloomington Utilities. Rather, condensation from the air conditioners on the roof next door, one floor above the garden, is collected and stored in a network of interconnected rain barrels.

All the vegetables are growing in pots: five-gallon buckets, wading pools, even cast-off tires.

Jobe noted that they like to "upcycle" their pots: strawberries are growing in cast-off ceiling light covers. Potatoes are growing in the tires, and after harvest of this year's crop, additional tires will be stacked on top of the first, and more soil added, allowing a bigger crop of spuds.

Cantaloupe sprouts from mounds of soil filling kiddie pools that Lowe's donated at the end of last summer — items that would have been thrown out rather than stored for the winter.

The idea for growing melons in wading pools came from a rooftop garden at Hell's Kitchen restaurant in New York City, Andi Jobe said.

There are other living roofs in Bloomington, she said, but this may be the first edible living roof in town.

The harvest goes to residents of New Wings and The Rise, Middle Way's apartment buildings. The organization offers support, including housing, to abused women and their children and pets.

Some of the rooftop produce is used for children's programs, too. Last year's garden featured pizza ingredients, so the young apartment dwellers could learn where food really comes from.

Last year, the garden was considered experimental, but the pilot project paid off. The Jobe sisters hope the garden will flourish with less work each year. Volunteers are building frames for raised beds for additional capacity.

Lauren Jobe said other interns are working on a business plan for the garden, so that someday it will be self-sustaining, and not reliant on grants for the purchase of plants, tools and equipment.