



East County residents seeking a healthier lifestyle now can do it while helping a local charity.

The non-profit Community Haven for Adults and Children with Disabilities this month launched its new Organic Buying Club program, a concept that allows members to pool their buying power to purchase a variety of seasonal produce in larger quantities and at reduced costs.

“We wanted to promote healthier lifestyles,” Buying Club Manager Carolyn Marchbank said. “It’s healthy and helping the community and supporting our folks.”

Club members pay a one-time \$25 membership fee, which enrolls them in the program. Members then can order one of three share sizes — ranging between \$29 for a quarter (one-person) share to \$49 for a full share (up to four people) — of organic fruits and vegetables grown in Florida, or the United States. The full share, for example, includes 20 to 35 pounds of produce with 11 to 14 types of fruits and vegetables per purchase.

Each delivery week, Marchbank will choose from seasonal vegetables and fruits being offered by Global Organics, including produce such as sugar snap peas, cucumbers, Valencia oranges, kale, tomatoes, zucchini and corn, among others.

Although many buying clubs pre-package produce for members, CHAC’s club will offer a market-style setting at which members can select their own produce.

Members also will be provided with a weekly newsletter of what produce will be available, as well as recipes for seasonal items and more, Marchbank said.

“It gets people to try things they would never have tried,” Marchbank said of the variety of seasonal produce offered. “We’ll be able to offer organic fruits and vegetables to the public at reasonable prices. The pickups will be here so they can see what we do.”

Community Haven’s plant nursery, where pickups occur, serves as a training facility for clients from CHAC’s Adult Day Training Center, where disabled individuals learn to care for plants and handle other day-to-day grounds maintenance issues at the facility for an hourly wage. CHAC sells a variety of plants grown on site at the nursery, as well as at several local farmers markets, to help raise money for the organization and teach its clients workforce skills.

Marchbank said the idea for the Organic Buying Club stems from an initiative undertaken by Leadership Sarasota about two years ago, when volunteers of the group developed an organic garden on a half-acre plot behind CHAC’s plant nursery.

“We were using the produce (from it) to feed our children in Selby Preschool and the group homes,” Marchbank said. “We’d harvest the vegetables and take them to our culinary department, where our clients prepared them for meals. We also sold (them) to the general public.”

The success of the partnership fostered a new idea: a community-supported agriculture program or a buying club.

Because of the challenges of growing crops in Florida, particularly during the hot summer months, CHAC organizers decided a buying club would be their best option. Organizers have worked with Geraldson Farms in Bradenton and other organizations over the last year to develop the new Buying Club program.

Marchbank said she hopes to have 100 buying club members within the program’s first year.

For more, contact Marchbank at 780-2665.

Community Haven Organic Buying Club

MEMBERSHIP: \$25 one-time due

SHARES: One-, two- and four-person shares of produce cost \$29, \$39 and \$49, respectively. A full share, for example, includes 11 to 14 types of fruits and vegetables. Payments are due one week in advance of pickup.

PICK-UP: 9-11 a.m., every other Saturday starting July 9, at the Community Haven Plant Nursery, 4405 DeSoto Road, Sarasota

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INFORMATION: www.communityhaven.com

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