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DONOR OF THE DAY | By V.L. Hendrickson

Helping Kids Grow With Gardens and Greenhouses

After 83 years, Andrus is getting back to the land.

Andrus, a therapeutic school which provides an array of services for more than 2,500 children and their families in Westchester County, was once a working farm. Now, with the help of Jenny and Dave Dobell, the Andrus campus has an agricultural program again, Hope Space, complete with renovated greenhouses, gardens and even a few farm animals. The couple donated \$14,000 and spearheaded a drive that has raised more than \$200,000. Andrus will celebrate the program, as well as its longtime president

and CEO, Nancy Woodruff Ment, and William P. Harrington, the chairman of the Westchester County Association, at a gala on Friday.

The Dobells were referred to Andrus when their son, Henry, was experiencing "serious, unexplained emotional problems," said Ms. Dobell. Of all the programs offered by Andrus, Henry "latched on to their gardening program," she said. Even in February, the students were ordering seeds for the garden (Henry chose sugar snap peas, Ms. Dobell recalled).

But, the program was limited because the greenhouses

on campus were unusable.

"The greenhouses were from the 1950s, they were dilapidated, the glass was broken," Ms. Dobell said. "The kids loved the program so much, but they couldn't use something that could be so useful to them."

The Dobells, who are both 49 years old, approached the school, but there wasn't money for the repairs. So the couple reached out to their friends, asking for donations to help fund the project. "We wrote a letter to 20 friends—almost all of them responded with gifts from \$50 to \$5,000. None of them had children at the



Dave and Jenny Dobell

school or even at a therapeutic school," Ms. Dobell said.

Now, the greenhouses have been fully restored, the students are growing organic veg-

etables in raised beds and an exercise trail and meditative labyrinth have been added. Hope Space, the agricultural program, has become a signature program at the campus. Many of the students are prone to obesity because of the medication they take, and the program helps educate them on healthy eating as well as exercise.

The program continues to expand. A classroom is being restored, which will have a kitchen where students can prepare the food they have grown. And the first Merino lamb has arrived on campus, and others are on the way.

"Many of the students have never seen a farm animal in their lives," Ms. Dobell said. With the arrival of the animals, Andrus is also able to offer animal therapy, which is "huge for the kids," she said.

Although Henry, now 17, is no longer at Andrus, the Dobells have remained involved and Mr. Dobell, a partner at Saguenay Strathmore Capital, an investment-management company, sits on Andrus's board of directors.

"It's a fantastic cause," he said. "They are innocent victims and have such need. Andrus provides a framework and a nurturing environment."