

# Community Homestead

## Newsletter: Winter/Spring 2026

**Mission:** “to establish and maintain a community so that people with developmental and other disabilities can reach their fullest human potential”

501 280th Street, Osceola, WI 54020 (715) 294-3038 [www.communityhomestead.org](http://www.communityhomestead.org)

### Winter at Community Homestead

~Elena Neumann

After the busy wreath season, winter here in the community turned out to be slower than the active end of the summer months. The rhythm of the days becomes calmer, but that certainly doesn't mean there is nothing to do. Much of my time is spent in crafts, creating items that are sold at farmers markets or other events. This includes stencil cards, felting, puzzle painting, and more. Through this work I have the chance to learn many new skills. I was especially excited to learn how to work with stained glass and to create stars and small night lights together with others. One of the things I enjoy most about these activities is the social atmosphere that usually develops while working, creating a relaxed atmosphere where people talk, share stories, listen to music, and simply enjoy spending time and working together.

Winter is also perfect for bigger projects. There was finally time to renovate the living room and kitchen at Evening Star. A new floor was also laid! So even though the pace is slower, there is always something meaningful to work on, and it never gets boring.

Colder temperatures mean we spend more time indoors with cozy evenings and shared activities, like our regular Monday movie nights. Sunny winter days feel even more special when they arrive and the snowy landscape is beautiful and invites us outside as well. Recently, we made birdhouses out of bottle gourds and hung them up on Easter Hill. Classic winter activities like skiing or sledding make it fun so long as you are wearing the right clothes!

I can say that winter feels to me like a season that brings people together and makes the community feel especially warm and connected.

### Holiday Season ~Shannon Kulig

The holiday season at Community Homestead is full of activity and warmth.

We get to embrace the December energy when we immerse ourselves in wreath making and weekend shifts in the gift nook at the Schottler Family Tree Farm. This year we harvested our own trees on December 20th. The whole community, minus a few less hardy souls, plodded through snow and freezing winds to cut down and sled out a handful of beautiful trees. By December 24th everyone had trimmed out their trees and decorated them to flawless perfection. For those households that remembered to continue supplying their tree with water, the boughs remained green and supple for quite some time. Thankyou Shawn Schottler!

More impatient households removed decorations after the holiday and delivered them to some eager goats for speedy recycling. Goats don't only eat the needles off the trees, but also strip the bark and eat the small branches to wear their teeth. When the trees come out of their pen in the spring they are rubbed clean and are mere skeletons of their former selves. Today, March 16th, Terra, Storay, and I worked together to curry the goat's winter wool. Terra then took the wool and rolled it, sticking the balls onto the skeleton of a Christmas tree for the birds to take to line their nests.



Photo: Elena, Nastia and Chelsea

## Find Love Safely ~Nastia Baerg and Hannah Gregor

*NB:* We paid, and did a zoom call, and interview and talked about our life and what we want for the future. And they said they have a couple of people we might like and Christine prints the paper out and we look at it and talk about if I want to meet them. Then she emails the person. And some people don't answer, and some we meet. I went on a few dates with different people. I went bowling and had Chinese in Osceola. Another time, we took a walk to the waterfall and talked, but decided probably not a match so we moved on. Another guy came to Community Homestead and he was kind, but I did not think it was a match so we moved on. And then I met Dominic last October.

*HG:* I got a couple of matches and Christine emails their guardian or parent and sometimes she got an answer and sometimes not. It's actually safer if you have a point person like Christine. Christine and Richard or someone else from here drive us to meet our date.

*NB:* And she doesn't judge!

*HG:* I get emails about events or talk about relationships for Find Love Safely. We talk about that and if I am interested Christine emails them.

*HG:* We went to the Gala. On the way we picked up Dominic and some of us were in high heels and some were in tennis shoes, and we had name tags. It was nerve wracking for me because I was going to meet Cory for the first time and I didn't know if he was going to be there. There was dancing and meeting people and food and drink, and ticket prizes. Cory did turn up!

*NB:* The gala was very interesting and I have never been to one before. It took us a while to talk to people but by the end of the night I made a lot of friends. I met Dominic's friends too.

*NB:* I had a relationship before but it was not a good situation and it took me 8 years to get around to it again. I was looking for longterm and probably to live with, someone to talk to about life. If that person does something different than you do, then we can talk about our day together. I wanted someone who is nice to you, kind, you can tease each-other, you can trust them.



*Photo: Cory and Hannah*

*HG:* I wanted someone respectful who doesn't need you to change. Its kind of a package deal and you need to see me! I like to tell people about my relationship! It's important for me to tell people I am excited and happy and I found someone I connect with. The guys I have known were not as rock solid as I want, not as trustworthy. I was looking for a longterm romantic partner, to talk about a future. together

and a special connection. Also we could reach out to whoever is out there and not just think about who is in the community. There's a lot more people to reach. I feel more independent in my relationship and I can ask for advice and guidance.

*NB:* I am more confident. I can talk more, and even though I feel shy, I know I can talk to people and just do it.

*HG:* We would recommend Find Love Safely for anyone who wants to give it a shot. If you want to find a friend, or find a long term romantic partner or if you want dating. Or just connection

in general.

## Goodbye and Hello

Goodbye to Elvis who moved to Augusta in November, to Sandy who moved last fall to her retirement home, and to Ana who returned to her life in the cities. Thank you all for your contributions.

Welcome to Dominic who joined the Evening Star household in March. Welcome also to Storay and to Hannah (yes, another one!) who joined the day program this winter.

Unfortunately, we have almost no international applications, so not much learning about cool cities, other languages and new friendships right now. That said, this week, Maxim is coming from France for three months! Yahoo! He joins our one wonderful young German, Elena!

We have a lot of summer interest but no commitments yet so, if YOU are interested in immersing yourself in a life of sunshine, idealism, gardening and community, apply! It's a wonderful experience for anyone, especially those interested in education, therapy or agriculture!

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## Farm in Winter ~Eric Witt

While it may have seemed slightly out of sync to be writing about winter on the farm during March's stretch of warm weather, muddy roads, and re-emerging fields, this week's winter storm and blizzard have made it feel timely as ever.

This past winter was a classic Wisconsin season. It began with steady snow and relatively mild temperatures, creating a peaceful start to the quiet months on the farm. As the weeks went on, the snowfall lightened but the cold settled in, bringing several stretches of severe temperatures and a few memorable polar vortexes that reminded us who is really in charge during a northern winter.

Through it all, the farmers and crew kept busy tending to cattle, goats, and pigs, adjusting daily routines to meet the challenges of winter weather. Frozen water lines, drifting snow, and biting winds are all part of the rhythm of the season, and caring for animals through those conditions requires patience, attention, and teamwork. Winter days on the farm may appear quiet from the outside, but they are full of steady work and careful stewardship. Much of that steady winter work has been carried by our barn crews—Nastia, Oscar, Joel, Travis, Hannah, Dominic, and Dusty—whose dedication keeps the animals well cared for even on the coldest days.

Winter also offers time for projects that are harder to tackle during the busy growing season. One highlight this year has been the renovation of a 1983 livestock trailer that had not been road-worthy for more than thirty years. Our goal is to restore it to service as the farm's beef enterprise continues to grow.

Work has also begun restoring the farmhouse shed that once served as an on-farm retail space for meat and produce and has been idle for nearly a decade. Plans include a new roof and interior improvements so the space can once again host on-farm sales. Both this project and the livestock trailer renovation have benefited greatly from the efforts of Travis, Oscar, Hannah, Dusty, Will, and Chris.

Meanwhile, the livestock are beginning to hint that spring is close. Five pigs are fattening up in the barn and should be ready just in time for the summer CSA season. The goats, who have spent the winter comfortably sheltered, are growing round and eager for the chance to get outside again for some much-needed exercise.

The beef herd has also been quietly busy through the winter months. A few calves arrived during the colder season from cows that calved slightly out of sync with the main herd.

The larger event is still ahead, with eleven cows expected to calve this spring. Each new calf marks another step forward for the farm's growing herd, and just as exciting is the approaching return of grazing season, when the cattle can once again spread out across green pastures after a long winter of hay and barnyard routines.

With calves arriving, pastures soon turning green, and another

season of work beginning, the farm is ready to leave winter behind and step into the promise of spring.



*Photo: Elias, Joel, Chelsea, Shannon, Janette, Hillary, Brendan, Elena & Hannah*

## The Care Farm Conference ~Hillary Schauls

First, we rode the trolley and had breakfast in Pittsburgh. It was a trolley like on Mr. Rogers. We also walked around. We went to Washington D.C. and saw monuments. I bought post cards of the Smithsonian Castle.

I rode the train there and back with Chelsea, Elias, Hannah, and Janette. We picked up everyone and went to a different hotel, the Marriott. On my way to tour an apartment, I fell on my knee and scraped it in the snow. We played scrabble at the coffee place at the apartment building.

At the CFN conference, I learned about new things. How to grow things; carrots, potatoes, like corn and pumpkins. I met other people who farm and have animals. We saw Jacob. Jacob was an Americorps in 2016. There was a fashion show and I was hip hopping with a friend. My friend Breza gave me a new hat.

## Bakery learning ~Batyah Selis

Whenever people ask what we do in the winter, I tell them about crafting and seed sorting and construction, but this winter I've experienced a very important piece of winter: experimentation!

Once we finish with the rush of summer—planting-weeding-harvesting- swimming-farmer's marketing and more, there's a moment to take a breath and look at the work we've been doing and see what's missing, or could be adjusted. For me, this has meant a winter of learning in the bakery. I had never baked cookies here, so I got a step by step walk through of the cookie making process from Desi.

We also got to test out some recipes like Potato Rosemary Bread and bagels for our winter farmers' markets- these breads have multi/day bake processes that feel almost impossible in the busy summer. But thank goodness for slow winter, fresh bagels in Osceola!! And the sourdough, oh, the sourdough. I'm still very much in study on this one, sometimes bubbly and great and sometimes falling flat, but thankfully there are many people around the farm to get advice or a fresh starter from. All this work in the winter lets me go into the summer season with a bit more of a solid foundation. Onwards to more bread!



## Garden ~Nadine Holder

In the middle of cold winter storm in January, the blue shed was delivered. It was pulled off a semi and skidded over the snow to its location along the garden path.

It came fully framed with exterior siding and windows and large double barn doors. We then insulated walls and floors and added interior siding. When we went to the hardware store for paint, white was on sale, so the inside walls, roof, floor and counters are totally white.

Next, we set up shop. We moved the stained-glass supplies and the bean cleaning trays, as well as a sling tote of black bean plants that we had pulled in the fall.

So far in stained glass Hannah, Nastia, Oscar and Ellena have made a dozen or so stars, a sunflower hanging, a coneflower, a dragonfly and a honey bee. We are currently working on a

cardinal and some nightlights.

Bruce and Alex Hanson have picked through 3 sling totes of dried beans and Kelly and Joel have sorted roughly 50# of threshed black beans.

Scott, Hillary and Ethan have washed and painted the hanging basket gourds that will be ready for the Mother's Day sale.

It has been absolutely wonderful to have a cozy shed for winter crafts. What I am looking forward to the most is when spring comes, and we are pulled into the greenhouses and then the fields, I will not be clearing it all out and storing it in my basement as I have every other year. All the supplies and set up can be stored where they are, waiting for our return next winter.

## Snowmobile Sledding ~Desi Peterson

When the snow fell, Richard was trying to get the old snowmobile to start up. Last year it was on its last leg. This year, it died.

So then Richard went on Craig's List to find a new snowmobile so we could go snowmobile sledding. He found one and it was a really, really, nice yellow one. We call it The Wasp,

A few days later when it snowed again, we inaugurated it with snowmobile sledding down the driveway and over the fields. I get a lot of thrill, and a few aches and pains in my butt because I am going over cow pats and bumps in the field but, it's so much fun!

## Book Binding ~Alex Felt

Last winter, we had a large and robust book-binding crew with 9 people. We had fun, and with a crew of that size, we focused on efficiency: who could excel at which step, and have them dial into that step that so we could craft a lot of books. (for Hannah, that was sewing softcover journals, for Hillary, preparing the cover paper with a medium so it was waterproof, for Joel, folding and preparing the pages of the books, etc)

This year, the book-binding crew started as a group of four: Travis, Hillary, Elena and myself. I saw from our inventory of books that the books in lowest supply were our hardcover books, which have the most steps involved. When I am leading a small group, we have the opportunity for everybody to be involved in each step, as my attention is not so fractured as when I am leading an orchestra of a crew (like last year)-- so when inevitably a person needs support through a step, I am ready to guide through that step, and then move to the next.

Sometimes this results in a discovery of some new aptitude or interest. Other times, it's just the feeling of pride at the end of the crew at the handmade book you just put together from start to finish.

Special shout out to Graham who joined the bookmaking crew at the end of February, adding a social element while folding paper for our stencil cards.

## Moving to Community Homestead

~Dom Colasanti

I heard about Community Homestead through Find Love Safely, which I heard about back at Special Olympics. I always dreamed about either living on a tropical island or a farm, and then I met this girl called Nastia who was interested in meeting me from Find Love Safely, and I was interested in meeting a girl who lived on a farm! We went to the zoo, out for coffee and a couple of outings and then my parents and the people at Community Homestead talked about gaining independence and having less stress and maybe moving to Community Homestead. So my opportunity to live on a farm came with also being with a lovely girl!

I did not really know what Community Homestead would be like or if that was a good decision for me or not. I was living in an apartment of my own in St Paul. It got lonely. Giving up my job at Fed X, would that be a good decision or not. Working in a factory setting, hearing the noise of conveyer belts, people yelling to be heard, was very stressful for me. People are organized here and are fast to reply so that was good for me when I was deciding. Over time, I found out this group in Osceola has made a positive impact on the stress in my life.

It's made my life healthier, eating organic food, trying new things. Being an outdoorsy person I have enjoyed the wood splitter, the chicken coop, pruning in the orchard, and getting apple trees ready for the season, crates in the garden crew, fun crafts and the wreath making in between, and some good social skills like eating with people I don't know and meeting people. I like all of it but nothing is better than the smell of cow manure after a day of hard work. I love doing all these things but I am looking forward to being outside a lot when the good weather comes and maybe Nastia and I will be on some of the same crews too.

Now it's less lonely and I like to be around people who all understand that people with disabilities can get stuff done even if it might take extra time, or help or something. And I like to be able to help other people too.

## Vacation Visits ~Nastia Baerg

I was very excited that people asked me and I went to all these places for the winter: skiing on the North Shore, Alabama, Florida, and Florida again!

In January, I went with Asher and Maddie to a cabin and we went out for breakfast and got cross country ski passes

at the gas station (they were very nice) and we went skiing. And I was trying something new going up the hill but I fell so I walked up! We cooked lunch and made a puzzle together. Asher and Maddie were arguing about how spicy it was-kinda cute- and I washed up but Asher said you don't need to do that but I said I'll do it!

Half of the community went to Alabama in one van, took about a day and I loved sitting on the beach. I went outside every morning looking for shark teeth.

Dominic asked his Mom if I could come on their

family trip and I was excited to be asked and to meet Dominic's family. We went fishing, Dominic caught a fish and then the hook went through his shirt and I am helping Dominic with pliers and his parents ran up and took photos and it was funny. We saw dolphins. I found a baby shark tooth. I saw a lizard and named it Frederic. It was nice also being with the kids and one of them really liked me!

I went to Florida, again! I went with Shannon, Eric, Aldo, Jill, Tim. We met her brother and his girlfriend there. We took a walk and saw an alligator and since then I saw alligators everywhere. I saw birds, baby alligators, so cute, and cute little squeaks. Tim did not really want to see them again but he forced himself to go for it. Also, Shannon, Jill and Tim, and sometime Eric went in the pool. And I did coconuts and got a sun tan/burn. We ate alligator meat and Aldo went nuts, and now it's his favorite food!

Thanks for people asking me if I want to come!



*Photo: Dominic and Nastia*

## Big Group Trip to Alabama ~Chris Mann

This January, I was party to my first Community Homestead “big van” trip. I had heard tell, but couldn’t imagine the irritation, exhaustion, and camaraderie that would emerge after 24 hours crammed in a passenger van together, racing a winter ice storm, en route to the idyllic beaches of Gulf Shores Alabama.

Having suffered the snores, burps and inaudible audio books of that interminable ride, we all sighed collective relief pulling into the driveway of our beach side Barbie House. And what an oasis! We spilled out into an en suite bedroom apiece, plus a lux kitchen, game room, heated pool, private beach, and dedicated movie room.

And over the week, we each found our own downbeat vacation grooves. Nastia couldn’t be kept from beach combing. Janette could, but only with her own indulgent naps. Dustin and Terra were posted-up poolside, swapping between swims and surf-gazing. Oscar and Scott got a hefty dose of comped ESPN, and Kelly too, when she wasn’t slipping off to shoot pool.

We broke the days up with outings – beach walks, visits to state parks, touring local shops, and a climactic karaoke night at a nearby cabana. I most enjoyed getting to see everyone loosen up. Away from the rigor of our normal life, we had more time to relax, and joke, and enjoy each other. People who normally operate in separate spheres of community life were able to find connection and repartee. There’s something special about just being together.

For me, the ride home was no less miserable than the first, but it wore easier for having known each other anew.



Photo: Chelsea & Rainy

## Mexico ~Joel Nester

I went to Puerto Vallarta with Mary and Ken, Jim and Ellen, and Paul. We just had like most of our meals outside our rooms. Breakfast was off the resort, lunch was on the beach, and supper was always a group outing sometimes on the resort and sometimes off the resort. We went into town and



Photo: Janette and Chris

they had an acrobatic thing: four men had ropes tied around their ankles and they were upside down and going around, spinning around and slowly going closer and closer to the ground.

Me and Paul go to stay at the resort several extra days because of a bad storm in the south central US. Me and Paul had to sleep over at the airport again at Dallas because of the storm. I was fine a couple more days!

## Denver ~Kelly McDaniel

I went to Denver. This time I did not meet up with Sarah, Maddie and Charlotte and Claire’s mom, on the flight! Like last time, a surprise! It was a medium size plane, a 737 and there were four people working.

I went to my brothers and he had to work and he put on the Price is Right, “You won a new car!” We went once or twice for a walk because it was cold this time but we watched the Olympics and the figure skating and the men’s hockey. They have a hockey team like the women do. I watched the jumping with the skis and the poles and they were high in the sky and it looked pretty dangerous but they had uniforms on.

I had tv dinners and dominos pizza and he made sugar-free drinks for me. Thank you Chris for inviting me. He wants to do it again sometime in the summer or the fall.

## Family visit ~Hillary Schauls

I went to Rochester to visit with my sister, Brigitte and her husband Nissar. One day we invited Jessie and Josh over for a Mexican night. The kids, Harris and Norah had swimming lessons and I watched them swim. I went to dinner with Blanche to a restaurant. I did a project with the kids which was Diamond Art mug with Harris, which was one. The second one was teaching them how to crochet. I was a Super Nanny!

## Thank you for your Donations August 2025 -mid March 2026



*Photo: Alex in Card Painting*

Natalie Alper-Leroux  
Margy & Gary Balwierz  
Cheryl Beardslee  
Laura & Bill Briggs  
Angela Burnett  
David Butler  
Wendy Chretien  
Winston Chuck  
Elizabeth Coffey  
Jeff Comins & Laurie  
Schmidt  
Ronald Erickson  
Elizabeth Fetter

Kristine Fowler  
Henry & Jennifer Gordon  
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In Memory of Steve Fons  
Gerard Heller & Steven  
Cummings  
Madelon Holder  
Patrick & Rosemary Hoye In  
Memory of Steve Fons  
Margaret Mahoney  
David Mann  
Kerry Meath-Sinkin  
Pamela Monteiro  
Dave O'Brian  
In Honor of Steve Bracket &  
Anni Simons  
Kathleen Papatola  
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Andersen Foundation  
Lockheed Martin  
Morgan Stanley  
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Foundation  
Thrivent Financial for  
Lutherans  
University of Minnesota



*Photo: Batyah, Hannah & Hannah  
in herb group*

## Food For All in 2025 ~Will Macaulay

2025 was another great year for our Food For All programming. Each year, we assess the needs of our wider community and raise funds to be able to grow, bake, and distribute produce, bread, and meat to food security efforts in our local area and the Twin Cities metro.

We are grateful to be in close relationship with local food distribution organizations - namely, the Open Cupboard in Osceola and the Zion Community Commons in St. Paul.

Over the past 6 years since we started our Food For All fund, we have grown and distributed around \$12,000 worth of fresh food to these efforts annually. Our ability to produce and distribute food to those who need it enriches the work that goes into producing it: when we are able to provide fresh, quality, organic food to our neighbors in need, and we know that we are supported and empowered by our wider community in doing so, we work toward a stronger, more resilient local food system for everyone. Food For All!!



*Photo: Dustin, Waldorf parents+children, Alex and Hannah*

*This photo is a group of us who were dehydrating apples and packaging our beans and food into bags so people in Minneapolis who can't leave their houses, could have something to eat. We were joined by parents and kids from the Minnesota Waldorf School ~Hannah Gregor*

## April 28 2026 Give Big ~Christine Elmquist

This is one day of enthusiastic, online, fund raising. For us, it is the biggest and most effective fund raiser of the year. It reminds us of the many people who are part of building this place and sustaining it, even as they live their own busy lives. Humbling.

On this one day every donation leverages matching funds

Once more, two big drives this year! We hope you can help us raise money for the Food For All Fund, and the Scholarship Fund for new people to access Community Homestead opportunities.

### Food For All: If people are hungry: feed them:

We grow it, bake it, cook it and distribute it to those that need it. You help us pay for the costs. Last year you helped us donate over 1000 pounds of organic vegetables, and 300 loaves of bread. Lets do that again!

Working closely with Osceola Open Cupboard, and food distributions in the twin cities, organic, fresh food gets right out onto people's plates. This has been particularly important this winter for families in the twin cities. No one should go hungry in such a beautiful growing area.

People with "disabilities" who need support to shine are the ones who are helping grow, create and distribute. Empathy and compassion is a super-power around here. There is a balance in receiving and giving help that highlights our common humanity. And we like that. We hope you do too.

### Scholarship Fund : If people need to come here, let them come:

DHS funding for people in Minnesota has been devastated by recent political events. On a federal and state level, funding is being radically re-organized, and people with disabilities are left in the muddle. In Wisconsin, it's better, but funding is not always available. Meanwhile young people need to take their first steps out of their family home, make friends, try new things, discover their own power, empower themselves. Right on the border here in the valley, our neighbors are on both sides of the state line. Help us create opportunities to Access Life, regardless of politics, state lines, OR income!

### What you can do to help

Donate online April 28

Donate by sending in a check in April, before the 28<sup>th</sup>.

Ask your friends to donate and tell everyone about Community Homestead!

## Wool ~Alex Hansen

We welt felt gnomes. I roll the wool in bubble wrap, put rubber bands on. I choose colors. I roll it. Makes a shape. A gnome! Christine needle felts the face, eyes, beard, flowers. Desi, Hannah, Elena, Nastia needle felt. Me and Bruce wet felt. We make pictures, gnome-scapes, birds.



Photo: Graham & Desi in wool group

We card wool. Hillary cleans the wool. Desi too. We wash it. Dry it on top of the freezer: air dry. Desi and Graham and Bruce too, do the carding. We are legend amazing.

We need more wool. Do you have any wool? Please! We can make it gnomies.

## Coming Events:

### Saturday March 28<sup>th</sup> 10-4pm - Spring Craft and Bake Sale

Community Center 519 280<sup>th</sup> St Osceola WI 54020

### April 28<sup>th</sup> Online All Day, Give Big Valleys

[www.https://www.givebigvalleys.org/organization/Community-Homestead](https://www.givebigvalleys.org/organization/Community-Homestead)

### Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup> 11-4pm - River Road Barn Crawl

We are one of several cool destinations. Stop in for pie, ice cream and crafts.

[www.facebook.com/RiverRoadCommunityFarms/](https://www.facebook.com/RiverRoadCommunityFarms/)

### Saturday June 6<sup>th</sup>, 9-3pm - Osceola Rhubarb Fest

Osceola Mill Pond and all over town. Come find us at the huge Rhubarb everything bake sale

### Osceola Farmer's Market

Fridays 2-6pm on River St, starting in June

### Stillwater Farmer's Market

Saturdays 8am-noon at the Courthouse 3<sup>rd</sup> and Pine, starting in June

### Saturday June 20<sup>th</sup> Country Banquet

with St Paul College here at Community Homestead

More details to follow on the website!  
[www.communityhomestead.org](http://www.communityhomestead.org)