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PHOTOS BY CATLIN GRANFIELD/FOR THE MIAM HERALD

MAKING SMOOTHIES: Gresia "Geo" Gomez, 33, combines fruit with milk and chia seeds into a smoothie at Homestead's Verde Community, which is providing work for the formerly homeless.



**FARM-FRESH:** Produce grown on the farm is available for purchase onsite at Verde Market and at other markets throughout the region.

An organic farm, market and café in Homestead provides fresh produce to the community and helps people transition out of homelessness.

BY CAITLIN GRANFIELD

arts of the former Homestead Air Force Base, left vacant for more than two decades after Hurricane Andrew's fury, have been reborn as a 22-acre organic farm and farmers market, an eco-friendly housing complex for the formerly homeless, and a recently added openair cafe that serves a true farm-to-table experience.

Verde Community Farm and Market, managed by Urban Oasis Project and Carrfour Supportive Housing, is positioning itself as an agro-tourism hub while providing work opportunities to people transitioning out of homelessness.

"If you want to know where your food comes from and get connected to it," said Chuck Lyons, Verde Farm's manager, "you can come here, go see the farm, you can see where we grow something that you're going

• TURN TO VERDE, 3E

## If You Go

What: Verde Community Farm, Market and Café.

Where: 12690 SW 280th St., Homestead. When: Verde Kitchen Café is open for lunch Tuesday-Saturday.

Prices: Sandwiches and salads \$6.50-\$12, baked goods \$1-\$3, juices and smoothies \$5.50-\$6.50.

More info: verdefarmandmarket.com; 305-257-2005. Email verdemarket@urbanoasis project.org for farm tours and volunteer opportunities.



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## South Dade's foodie appeal grows at Verde

VERDE, FROM 1E

to have in your salad."

Produce grown on the 2-year-old farm is available for purchase onsite at Verde Market and at Urban Oasis Project's farmers markets throughout Miami-Dade County, and is on the menu at restaurants from chefs like Michael Schwartz and baker Zak Stern.

Fruits and vegetables grown on the farm also are used to make sandwiches. salads and smoothies at Verde Kitchen Café, which had a soft opening in July. Verde Kitchen, coupled



CAITLIN GRANFIELD/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

VERDE: The community farm, market and café is aiming to be the area's new agro-tourism hub.

with the farm and "green" townhouses, gives residents of the community a sustainable work-life model.

Gresia "Geo" Gomez, 33. who lives in one of the affornew customer.

She and nine other resi- community. dents work at the café and in the kitchen, while five othhomelessness work on the meates all aspects of someorganic farm, learning job skills as part of the housing development's mission to promote self-sufficiency and camaraderie.

pounds and has picked up "There's no GMOs or additives. I actually feel more and playground. alive by eating healthier."

As operations expand, Verde will bring in more forworkers and residents.

spend here goes back to the community," said Francesca Steele, Verde Gardens' program director, "So it's not only that you're having this experience and you're havcommunity that's going to benefit from all of it."

This sustainable community model, believed to be the first of its kind in South Florida, generates revenue from the café and market,

health, financial and psychological services for hours, so they can make and residents.

that the formerly homeless dable residences, called staffers, many of whom have Verde. Verde Gardens, combines little or no prior work expecreamy mamey fruit with rience, will have learned owner and executive chef milk and chia seeds in a enough skills to prepare for a healthy school-lunch blender — a smoothie for a them for "real-world" jobs outside of the Verde of creating new, rotating

"The idea was to create a

one's life, be it quality affordable housing, to where they work, eat, to what their children are learning in after-school programming," "I'm learning more about said Stephanie Berman-Eiplants, especially fruits and senberg, president and CEO good for," Gomez said, not- Housing. The agency develing that she has shed 60 oped the \$14 million, LEEDcertified Verde residences better eating habits by living that have front porches and and working at Verde. lush yards and provide access to a community center

Carrfour receives funds from Miami-Dade County's Homeless Trust. After Hurmerly homeless people as ricane Andrew reduced the former Air Force base to "Everything that you rubble, the federal government deeded land to Miami-Dade County, which then endowed it to the Homeless Trust. The Trust contracted Carrfour, which collaborated with The Chapman Part- Market and Café, said he being yummy food, it's that nership, a homeless services lieves Verde will soon bring you're putting back into a support program, to build in the swarms of locals and and manage housing.

Verde Café's menu items feature the likes of umami sliders, made with grass-fed beef from Ocala, to baked goods and leafy choices like South Miami-Dade. the farmhouse salad, made and uses it to pay for em- with red dragon fruit, sun- rism experience here," ployees and cost of goods. flower shoots and micro-

Grant money goes toward greens. Local food vendors often rent the kitchen afterprepare food items, like jam Eventually, the hope is or fruit preserves, to sell at local farmers markets and at

Chef Adri Garcia, cocatering service, is in charge menu options for the café.

"What we're doing here is holistic and healthy envi- trying to get the whole comers transitioning out of ronment so that health per- munity in on the same level," she said, "It's not like going to Burger King; we don't have a Value Meal. But if you think about it, we do, because everything is coming from the ground up, and it's good for you."

As part of a national provegetables and what they're of Carrfour Supportive gram, Verde Market allows SNAP-eligible customers to receive up to \$40 worth of produce for \$20, and the farm's Community Supported Agriculture program matches EBT or SNAP dol-

> "We grow a lot of specialty items," Lyons said, "We're not just growing green leaf lettuce. We have like eight different varieties that you're not going to find at Publix. And more popular crops like kale, spinach, carrots and beets."

> Bill Squire, who is in charge of hiring for Verde tourists that currently go to Robert Is Here, Knaus Berry Farm and Schnebly Redlands Winery in search of local foodie experiences in

> "You get a whole eco-tou-Squire said.

