



> KEEPING HEALTHY Left and far left: Vegan and raw foods are included in cooking classes and catering. Top: A Saturday cooking class in session at The Lab. Above: Gregg Newsom and Angela Kasmala strive for a greener, healthier city. They founded their business last summer at their loft on Gratiot.

Lofty Ideas

The Detroit Evolution Lab is an experiment in health and education that appears to be working // By Terry Parris Jr.

In an airy Eastern Market loft, Gregg Newsom and Angela Kasmala are shaping a concept that they believe is part of a new Detroit mindset.

"It's not a renaissance," Newsom says, searching for the word. "It's really, I guess, an evolution, the evolution of Detroit, like our name." He's referring to the Detroit Evolution Lab, a business he and Kasmala, both native Detroiters, founded last summer when they moved into the loft on Gratiot.

The Lab is a health and education center that offers yoga classes, Saturday cooking instruction for vegan (no animal products) and raw food (uncooked, unprocessed, and organic), and catering, as well as massage and body work. The Lab is also their home.

Kasmala, who trained at the Schoolcraft College Culinary Arts program, then at the Creative Health Institute in Union City, Mich., designs the ever-changing vegan and raw food menu. She prepares food in the kitchen of a local church, using organic and local produce. "We try to keep the orders limited," she says. "I want to put all the love I can in it."

Newsom, who formerly worked in business development for Compuware, teaches what he calls "community-based yoga," which is tailored to fit the level of walk-in clients. "It's not a Powerhouse Gym class," he says. "You can practice at whatever level you feel comfortable, no pressure; it's about energy."

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— ANGELA KASMALA

However, the two owners believe they're offering more than just services. They suggest that The Lab is part of a sort of hippie-style subculture that's at the forefront of a bigger picture, one that's about a greener, healthier city. It's a shift born of the frustration of relying on big businesses to fix Detroit's ills. They say the answer lies in several elements, including grass-roots organizations that promote sustainable living. They include the Greening of Detroit, the Detroit Agriculture Network, and Earth Works Garden/Capuchin Soup Kitchen.

The idea of these organizations is to take vacant lots in city neighborhoods and convert them to urban gardens and small-scale farms that promote good nutrition, healthy land use, and sustainable urban natural resources.

Newsom and Kasmala believe that this "evolution" is poised to explode. Just last August, for example, the Detroit Agriculture Network's 10th annual Urban Garden Tour drew more than 400 people.

That agrarian undercurrent caught the attention of *Harper's Magazine* last summer. In July, its story portrayed Detroit as a post-American landscape, a city in which "the clock seems to be running backward."

Considering the expanding urban agricultural network and the modern-day hippie-style cottage industries springing up, Detroit may indeed be an example of back to the future.

Detroit Evolution Lab, 1434 Gratiot, No. 1; 313-316-1411, detroitevolution.com. Other green sources: greeningofdetroit.com, earth-works.org, detroitagriculture.org