

**PAUL LEE** vividly remembers a frigid night in 1976: The former philosophy professor was on a London subway platform when he heard a death rattle coming from a man lying on a bench. Even though Lee believed the man would be dead by the morning, he boarded the train alone. "I have never forgiven myself," he says.

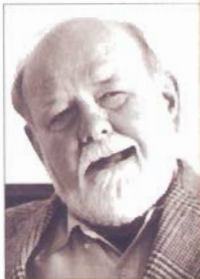
That experience inspired Lee to open the first homeless shelter in Santa Cruz, Calif., in 1985 and, five years later, to co-found the area's Homeless Garden Project, a 5-acre organic farm that employs 20 homeless workers and five staff members. Close to 100 local families support the farm, each paying about \$450 a year for produce harvested during a 29-week growing season. Since the project started, more than 200 workers have learned marketable job skills.

Bill Tracey, a formerly homeless Vietnam vet who worked on the garden's compost operation for four years, now has his own landscaping business. Tracey

credits Lee with helping him learn how to make a garden from scratch, thereby getting him off the streets. "If life hands you garbage, make compost," Tracey says.

"A visionary Santa Claus" is how Lynne Basehore Cooper, co-founder of the garden project, describes Lee. Recently, he snared AmeriCorps funding that guarantees wages for a 24-member team of students and homeless workers.

Not content simply to garden at home, Lee has set his sights on Washington. If all goes well, Lee says his AmeriCorps farmers will be teaming up with restaurateur Alice Waters to plant an organic garden at the White House.



**PAUL LEE:**  
not your average  
garden-variety  
altruist

—DEIRDRE GUTHRIE