

## **Gary Oppenheimer**

### **A Brief Introduction**

Gary Oppenheimer, a CNN Hero, a Master Gardener, Rutgers Environmental Steward, Huffington Post's "Greatest Person of the Day" and founder of the AmpleHarvest.org Campaign now makes his home in the mountains of northern New Jersey after having lived and on a boat on the Hudson River in Manhattan since 1978.

After graduating from college with a degree in psychology, he promptly lost all interest in the field and instead became one of the early geeks in the personal computing arena (he soldered a computer together in 1976 – he still has it but is now afraid to now power it up) and he designed a prototype email program for a mini-computer in 1977 while working for a New York bank. Although it never went any further, he was "hooked" on computers.

In 1985, MCI asked Gary to help them sell and support the then fledging MCI Mail electronic mail service. Within a few years, he became their largest global sales agent (including producing what is believe to be the first "ezine" – published from 1985 to 1996) – while working from a home office located on the boat.

In the early 2000's after buying a home deep in the woods in a rural northern New Jersey and planting an orchard and garden, Gary realized he actually needed to learn how to grow things and became a Master Gardener. A year later, he completed the Rutgers Environmental Stewards program.

Over the next several years, he expanded his home gardens, became an environmental commissioner in his town, advocated for region wide watershed preservation laws and became the director of a community garden.

Aware of the increasing hunger problem in America and, in 2009, after seeing the amount of wasted food in the community garden as well as other gardens around the country, he created the AmpleHarvest.org Campaign – a nationwide effort to enable America's 40+ million home gardeners who grow food to be able to easily find a local food pantry eager for their excess garden bounty.

Backed by the USDA, Google Inc. the National Gardening Association and many faith and service organizations, AmpleHarvest.org has grown to more than 3,100 food pantries, or one out of every ten in America, in only 20 months. In early 2010, Gary was invited to present AmpleHarvest.org to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Peoples Garden Initiative Conference in Washington DC, in May of 2010, was introduced on Larry King Live as a CNN Hero and most recently was invited to speak at Wharton.

Gary is a firm believer in the notion that to do the impossible, you must first believe it isn't.

He enjoys long distance cycling, boating, hiking, attacking challenges of all sorts, pondering unusual questions and discussing political/social issues at a neighborhood tavern with people who generally don't agree with him. Gary is the proud father of a University of Connecticut Honors Junior (also a nationally ranked bicycle racer) and is married to a remarkable woman who has put up with him all these years.