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NATALIE RONAYNE

**34 Executive director
Cleveland Botanical Garden**

From the time she could order her own salad — all fresh ingredients, please — at the local restaurant, Natalie Ronayne has understood the importance of the environment and plant life to all walks of life.

It hadn't been as easy to impart that wisdom to others — until now.

The "green" phenomenon and sustainability boom, about which you hear from the grocery store to the oil change joint to the wind farm, has helped the 34-year-old executive director of the Cleveland Botanical Garden and her team spread the word.

"Society is demanding more accountability in sustainability," said Mrs. Ronayne, who grew up on a farm in New Lyme, located

between Jefferson and Andover in Ashtabula County. "And people are demanding us to show them how, to show leadership in that area."

That leadership, and the affable Mrs. Ronayne's proudest accomplishment, arrive most tangibly in six gardens run by students in Green Corps, a program started in 1996 in which Cleveland high students transform vacant urban lots into sustainable gardens.

Mrs. Ronayne said her hope is that the students enrolled in the program — over 50 this summer — benefit from the opportunity that "changed her life when she grew up, that set (her) on a course."

The students choose what they want to grow — including vegetables, flowers and even potpourri — and eventually take their fruits to farmers' markets. Their salsa, branded "Ripe from Downtown," winds up in select supermarkets in the city and its suburbs.

"We're checking off five or six

boxes," said Mrs. Ronayne, who is married to University Circle Inc. president Chris Ronayne, with whom she has a 6-month-old daughter, Audrey. "The farms help property value. They reduce crime, improve nutrition access, educate students."

Mrs. Ronayne managed a \$70 million budget and 600 employees as Cleveland's parks director under former Mayor Jane Campbell before joining the botanical garden. Previously, she worked in Deloitte & Touche's real estate consulting practice and then moved to Davey Tree, a provider of tree and lawn care services, where she provided environmental assistance to clients.

ParkWorks Cleveland director Ann Zoller said no challenge is too large for Mrs. Ronayne.

"I always felt that Natalie is this really incredible mixture of confidence and mission-driven," Ms. Zoller said, "and when she sees a vision, she articulates it and delivers on it."

— Joel Hammond

