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Community Garden: Keeping it Green

This past summer the ReNU Niagara COPC office initiated a new community vegetable garden in Niagara Falls. Our AmeriCorps VISTA member Rebecca Schicker and student assistant Joe Fitzpatrick recruited 183 volunteers, providing a total of 692 volunteer hours. Of the total Volunteers, 108 were local youth who joined in the efforts to create this beautiful garden.

The garden is located at Neighborhood Housing Services 479 16th street. The project provided a wide variety of vegetables to several local residents. Senior citizens were able to purchase vegetables at a low and affordable price. In the food markets today, vegetable prices have steadily increased.

Children who helped plant the garden saw the importance of their hard work paying off. Senior citizens also helped mentor the children while planting the seeds. The garden was also a great summer project for kids to keep them learning in a fun atmosphere.

Neighborhood Housing



Niagara Falls resident Mr. King, local youth Deajahnee, and Neighborhood Housing Services board president Mark Mont cut the ribbon on the new community vegetable garden.

Services, along with ReNU Niagara, organized a recognition dinner to honor those who volunteered several hours to plant, cultivate and manage the garden. The dinner was held at the Niagara Falls Boys and Girls Club on Nov 13. Michael's Italian Restaurant donated the dinner and dessert was provided by DiCamillo Bakery. Individual certificates, which were signed by Mayor Paul Dyster, were given to the youth who volunteered with the garden. Mayor Dyster was in attendance, along with 125 people.

The ReNU Niagara office has

been awarded funds from a local foundation to establish another community vegetable garden in the north end of Niagara Falls next summer. This grant will also give ReNU Niagara funds to set up low-maintenance green spaces on vacant lots to curb illegal dumping and to beautify selected entryways to the Highland community.

We would love to hear feedback from the community, and if you are interested in volunteering please contact our office 716-205-0289.

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***"The NU
accounting
department
trained 56
volunteers
who prepared
724 tax
returns that
resulted in tax
refunds of
\$205,583."***

Review of Area 1: Capacity Building

In August 2007, 50 individuals attended a event for the Volunteer Center that currently has 49 agencies registered and has referred 249 volunteers. ReNU Niagara holds monthly COPC Chats for nonprofits and thus far has hosted nine speakers. Beginning in 2007, ReNU Niagara and the United Ways of the Niagara region partnered to conduct a community-wide needs assessment. In April 2008, more than 60

individuals attended a presentation for the GIS Analysis of Health and Human Services in Niagara County and Tonawanda by NU graduate student Rebecca Schicker who is currently working with NU's department of social work to complete the second phase of the project. ReNU Niagara also partnered with NU's continuing education office and a representative from the local HUD office

to create a three-part organizational development workshop series for non-profits during the spring, summer, and fall of 2008. In addition, an all-day grant training session will be held in December for all interested nonprofits and community members. Please contact the ReNU office at 716-205-0289 for more information.

Review of Area 2: Economic Development and Employment

In spring 2007, nine Niagara University MBA students provided technical assistance to small and family-owned businesses by assisting in the development and implementation of a marketing strategy. That same year, Niagara University's Hospitality Training and Research Center utilized ReNU Niagara's conference room to provide two training sessions to assist economically disadvantaged out-of-school youths find employment in the hospitality industry. Ten job-training posters also

continue to be posted throughout the community and updated with monthly inserts. During the 2007 income tax season, the NU accounting department trained 35 students who prepared 391 tax returns that resulted in tax refunds of \$314,561. The NU accounting department also trained 56 volunteers who prepared 724 tax returns that resulted in tax refunds of \$205,583 during the 2008 income tax season. Consumer Credit Counseling Services Inc. of Buffalo began using a private counseling area in the ReNU Niagara office in December 2007. Thus far,

80 individuals have been seen on Thursdays. Lastly, ReNU Niagara is currently partnering with the City of Niagara Falls to administer a 12-week entrepreneurial training program for Niagara Falls residents looking to start a small business. Applicants who complete the course will be eligible for grants and loans to assist in the start-up process of their businesses. The entrepreneurial training program was made possible through funds from state Senator Antoine Thompson.

Review of Area 3: Environmental Justice and Health

In October 2006, the GreenLine was launched as a referral and informational line for residents with questions about their health and environment. One hundred and ninety calls have been received to date. During spring 2008, Niagara Falls residents called into the GreenLine to register more than 1,000 volunteers for the annual Beautify Niagara clean-up. In spring 2008, ReNU Niagara partnered with Niagara Memorial Medical Center, Niagara County Department of Health's Healthy Neighborhoods program, Cornell Cooperative

"Residents called into the GreenLine to register more than 1,000 volunteers"

Extension, and Erie-Niagara Tobacco-Free Coalition to present a free asthma workshop that was attended by more than 75 residents. During the summers of 2007 and 2008, NU chemistry students, under the direction of Dr. Ronny Priefer, performed home assessments in Niagara Falls with the Healthy Neighborhoods program. Air samples were taken

by the students and then analyzed at Niagara University laboratories in order to test indoor air quality. In the summer of 2008, an NU summer student completed a draft of a handbook for residents with strategies to deal with vacant lots. The student met with city officials and departments to explore the current process of reporting issues with vacant lots and is researching innovative programs in other cities, including Philadelphia and Baltimore.

How has the ReNU Niagara COPC office helped our partners?:

"The partnership between ReNU Niagara COPC and the Niagara Falls Block Club Council has been ongoing since the opening of the Main Street location. The COPC team has always been available to attend our public functions providing information to the neighborhoods we serve."

"The Niagara Beautification Commission has benefited from the services of ReNU Niagara COPC during our annual Beautify Niagara clean-up campaign held in April of this year. COPC student volunteers assisted our efforts by taking the volunteer sign-up information on their established Green-Line and compiling this in an orderly fashion for follow up. Over 13,000 volunteers signed up from well over 1,000 telephone calls. This was a tremendous effort and very appreciated. COPC director Shuey also attends Niagara Beautification Commission meetings whenever possible to provide insight of their activities."

- Norma Higgs

Niagara Beautification Commission

"As the supervisor and public health educator of the Healthy Neighborhoods Program from the Niagara County Health Department, I can only make positive comments about our relationship with COPC ReNU Niagara. Under the direction of Jill Shuey, Becky Schicker, Mary Ann Broda and a changing support staff have all contributed to our program by promoting communications with other community agencies, distributing relevant information, sharing their resources in the form of interns in our program, and much, much more. The staff works diligently to achieve its goals of sustainable neighborhoods and positive programming that influences citizens of all ages. It is an honor and a privilege to be a COPC partner."

- Theresa M. McCabe

Supervisor & Public Health Educator

"ReNU Niagara has reached out and provided support and assistance to Niagara Falls Memorial's Community Health Worker Program collectively, our efforts better served those in need. Thank you for your unyielding efforts to help our community!"

- Kim M. Congi

Community Partners

Center City Neighborhood
Development Corporation

Center for Joy

Cornell Cooperative Extension

EveryWoman Opportunity
Center, Inc.

God's Woman

HANCI-RSVP

Heart, Love and Soul Soup
Kitchen

Highland Community
Revitalization Committee, Inc.

Main Street Business and
Professional Association, Inc.

Michigan Ave. Block Club

Mt. Saint Mary's Hospital

Niagara Beautification
Commission

Niagara County Dept. of
Health/ Healthy
Neighborhoods Program

Niagara County Employment &
Training/One Stop Center

Niagara County Workforce
Investment Board

Niagara Falls Block Club
Council

Niagara Beautification
Commission

Niagara Falls Housing
Authority, Doris W. Jones
Family Resource Building

Niagara Falls Memorial Medical
Center

Niagara Falls Weed and Seed

United Way of Niagara

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE RENU NIAGARA STAFF!



Back row: Rebecca Schicker, Mary Ann Broda, Joseph Fitzpatrick, Jill Shuey,
Meghan Lytle, Dave Taylor, Ava Taylor, Front Row: Tara Dunham, Jessica Collier

Up coming Events:

December:

11– HUD grant-writing training (9 am) at Bisgrove Hall Niagara
University. Preregistration is required. Program is free.
Contact: NU Continuing Education: 286-8181

18- Good for the Neighborhood at NF Housing Authority

On-going activities:

- For volunteer opportunities in your area please refer to our
volunteer center web site: www.niagara.edu/copc
or visit our office located at 1618 Main Street
 - Green-Line (716) 205-0287: a referral for your questions or
concerns about environmental and health issues
 - Stay tuned-income tax assistance coming February 2009
- ** Please check our web site for other information ****