Marketing Urban Agriculture

By Jennifer Jaworski

For most students, class projects are relatively routine and not always applicable to their real world situations. Not so for Allison Ingalls. As a final project for her Principles of Marketing course, Allison and her group incorporated the partnership RIT has with the NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance (NENA) and the Greater Rochester Urban Bounty (GRUB).

Allison has long been interested in community development, and began working with NENA on a promotions project in October 2005. During winter quarter, Allison saw an opportunity to apply her Principles of Marketing course to a real-life situation and it was not hard for her to quickly recruit a team open to the idea of incorporating the NENA-RIT Partnership. “It’s nice to see (NENA) integrated into class...it’s really exciting to have people working with me on (this project),” Allison says.

Working with community leaders, Shirley Edwards and Bob Vickers and partnership coordinator, Meredith Dalton, the students are formulating a strategic marketing plan for the Vineyard in northeast Rochester, building an Agriculture Education Center on the plot seemed the next logical step. Ground breaking for the Agriculture Center took place on July 20, 2005, and a ribbon cutting ceremony is projected for Fall 2006.

The new Agricultural center will serve many purposes, including: a food and cooking area, a greenhouse, classroom, and living quarters for a farm caretaker. Once the center is finished GRUB partners and participants will be able to cook, can, and preserve foods from the Vineyard on-site. The center will also be useful during the many activities held at the Vineyard, which include jazz and gospel festivals and wedding receptions. During events such as the jazz festival, local artists display and sell their artwork, while food vendors set up on the lawn and in the street. These events help bring revenue to the Vineyard for their operations and a sense of community to the neighborhood.

The community garden has an impact of bringing people together, working toward a common goal. The enthusiasm community members have for this space is contagious.

Local students from Edison Technical High School assisted Agriculture Center Construction Manager, Bob Vickers and his construction team with laying the foundation for the Center. The students gained valuable hands on experience, and found Mr. Vickers a willing mentor. Edison Tech students also assembled the enclosed gazebo at the Vineyard. No small task with a capacity for more than 40 people.
Education Center

Preston Sanders, Director of North Street Recreational Center located in the neighborhood, also plans to involve some of the youth he works with. He hopes many of them will be heading to the Vineyard this Spring to help with planting.

According to GRUB organizer, Shirley Edwards, the “making of (the Vineyard) is not just one person, it is many people coming together...something magical. From three year olds to one gentleman who was 87” the Vineyard brings the community together.

There are eleven organizations pooling their resources and talents for the new Agriculture Center project. The skill that went into the design and planning of the Vineyard and Agriculture Center were twice recognized, including an award from the American Landscape Architects.

The Vineyard and the Agriculture Center are unique for building potential to bring the community together. The community leaders working with GRUB are inspirational and dedicated to their projects and to the community. Upon completion of this newest community asset will be a venue for continued community building.

Marketing

Working with community leaders, Shirley Edwards and Bob Vickers and partnership coordinator, Meredith Dalton, the students are formulating a strategic marketing plan for GRUB. The students were able to gain real-life experience, and have the satisfaction of knowing their work has made a difference. Marketing team member, Stephanie Riegelsperger enjoyed the fact that working with GRUB and NENA allowed them to “see a different part of the city, knowing it exists, getting the word out.”

Some of the main questions addressed by the group when developing the plan for GRUB included: Where is the organization now? Where do they want to be? How do they get there? The fact that these organizations are nonprofit, and thus have different goals from most companies, gave a unique perspective to the project. The project branched out in some unexpected directions as the group learned more about the organization. The project is “really in depth for a beginning marketing course,” says Allison.

All of the findings and recommendations will be presented to the members of GRUB at the end of the academic quarter.

Allison Ingalls, Stephanie Riegelsperger, Parthiv Navda, and Linsay Miller work together at the RIT Library.
Anthropology Professor Christine Kray understands the impact global movements have on local communities. In her class, Social Movements in the Global Economy, students studied outsourcing and the effect it can have on urban neighborhoods. To help students apply the concepts covered by the course, Professor Kray incorporated the NENA-RIT partnership and NENA’s urban agricultural initiative, the Greater Rochester Urban Bounty (GRUB). The NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance works to revitalize Rochester’s northeast neighborhoods in part, by nurturing local business initiatives to stimulate economic development.

“The student project was geared to furthering GRUB’s vision to create a food-based business.”

explains Professor Kray, they were “very enthused” about the option of working with GRUB.

The students in this class worked with GRUB, which sells fresh, chemical-free produce grown on NENA’s urban farm plots, such as The Vineyard. At the end of the growing season GRUB is often left with a surplus of produce, which the community leaders are interested in using to produce jams, jellies, sauces, salsas, and other canned goods. These products could be sold locally, helping GRUB to make use of their resources year round. With the construction of the new Agricultural Education Center, which will include a kitchen area, this plan is fast becoming a reality.

Students were given an option to work with GRUB on a variety of projects. Many students responded with enthusiasm at the chance to use their knowledge and resources to help a real-life organization. “(I’ve) done so many research papers...here it felt like I could work close to home, do something that can help actual people.” Says student Liza Liubkina. Projects included designing jar labels, researching and compiling a recipe book, investigating canning technology, local product promotion, and comparisons to other community gardens that have branched out into food-based businesses.

As an introduction to GRUB and NENA, Professor Kray’s class visited the Vineyard, where they met with community leaders, Bob Vickers and Shirley Edwards, who devote a large part of their time to GRUB.

Mr. Vickers and Mrs. Edwards described the history of GRUB, the Vineyard, and Sector 10 to the students and discussed current projects the students could help with.

One such project was researching the activities of local businesses to help GRUB plan events to be held at the Vineyard.

Industrial design student, Lisa Aronson, researched numerous businesses and organizations, including local churches, the George Eastman House, Casa Larga winery, and various museums, to compile a detailed report of various events hosted by each organization, how much they charge for admittance, their hours of operation, and advertising practices. This information will serve as a resource for the planning of future events held at the Vineyard. Lisa chose to

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Living in Rochester for most of his life has given Preston Sanders a drive to improve the city he lives in. Through his work at the North Street Recreational Center, Preston has been able to provide local youth with a safe and constructive after school environment.

Located at 700 North Street in downtown Rochester, The center is open six days a week, and is one of nine such facilities in the Rochester area. The center is open to children of all ages and offers youth healthy and productive after school alternatives. Youth at the center enjoy a wide range of sports, including football, basketball, softball, and soccer. Arts and crafts, ceramics classes, and self-defense lessons are also popular activities.

In addition to everyday activities, the center hosts yearly special events, always with an eye on safety. An annual breakfast with Santa brings young children and parents together, while a Valentine’s Day dance gives older kids something to look forward to. While the boys come mainly for the sports, it’s the dancing that holds the attention of many of the girls. To encourage education, tutors come to help students with homework and computer technology classes. Everything the center does is geared towards improving the current and future lives of the young people who pass through its doors each day.

Many residents from this community believe the youth are the future of the community, so improving the community begins with creating opportunities for the youth.

Come spring, many kids from the center will work at the Vineyard to help GRUB prepare for the coming growing season. “There is something to working in a garden that’s very fulfilling, you get to see the fruits of your labor grow and blossom.” Says Preston.

For the 170 to 200 kids that come to the center each day, it’s like a second home. Staff is very proactive, and promotes good behavior in the kids. Rewards such as future use of a new teen lounge, currently in the planning phase, offers kids an incentive to come to the center, and show respect to their peers. All the City recreation centers have a teen council that empowers the youths to make decisions about their center. At North Street Preston works with the teen council as a way to get the kids input on various issues. This gives the young people a vested interest in their center, as well as teaching responsibility.

One of Preston’s strengths as Director is his knowledge of the neighborhood he’s working with. The North Street area is a notoriously rough section of the city, however Preston sees this “not as a people thing, it’s just economics...we get caught up in the exterior of people.” Talking to Preston gives one the feeling that anything is possible; it’s hard to image anything other than the complete success of any project he touches.

RIT first became involved with North Street about a year and a half ago to share resources and “break down negative stereotypes” between the campus and urban community.

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Jeanette Warner and Youth at North Street.
Social Movements

work with GRUB because she was “inspired to help others out.” Not only did this project compile a large amount of information for the community leaders to use, but Lisa also saw this as an opportunity to make NENA and the Vineyard better known to the Rochester community. “I don’t think I’ve ever really done a project like this before...this is a project where it’s really full circle.”

Another student in Professor Kray’s class was Liza Liubkina, a fourth year Packaging Science major. Liza’s project focused on canning technology to preserve surplus produce. Liza’s team studied the canning process, costs involved, and what materials were needed. As a packaging science major the canning project was right up her alley.

The project was “really about providing (GRUB) with more information on what their alternatives are.” Not only did Liza look into canning and jarring, she also researched freezing technologies that would be low cost and efficient.

One of the student projects was presented to community leaders at a student symposium held on campus in January. The remaining project research will be compiled and presented to the NENA Council. The community-based learning had a significant impact on Professor Kray’s students, as Lisa Aronson comments, “You study people (in the class) and then at the end of the quarter you deliver something to help these people. There’s a very clear purpose.”

700 North Street

Currently, RIT students, such as fourth year photography student Jeanette Warner, volunteer at the North Street, interacting with the young people there, and forming important bonds. This give and take breaks down stereotypes and helps build a foundation for future collaboration.

The partnership is currently building a youth development program which will include an AmeriCorps*VISTA member to design and lead youth development and youth-led community building activities in collaboration with youth council at the North Street. Please contact Meredith Dalton, project coordinator, at 585.475.2656 if you are interested in applying for this VISTA position.

Jeanette Warner and Youth at North Street.
AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America) is a one-year volunteer position designed to submerge you in a project with the direct purpose of combating poverty.

The NENA-RIT Partnership is recruiting a VISTA volunteer to begin in July 2006. The volunteer will work with the partnership to design and lead youth development and youth-led community building activities in collaboration with the Youth Council at North Street Recreation Center.

This experience is guaranteed to give you a first-hand experience of working with grassroots people organizing to create a better future for themselves, their youth and their neighborhoods.

If this sounds interesting to you, contact Meredith Dalton, NENA-RIT project coordinator, 585.475.2656 or MADGLA@rit.edu.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS JUNE 15, 2006.

NOTE: This is a one-year submersion volunteer position. The stipend is $840/month, including health benefits, and the VISTA member can not be additionally employed or enrolled in classes.