Learning Through Community

Summer 2008
Ms. Shirley Edwards

This publication is dedicated to Ms. Shirley Edwards, NEBCA Executive Director and founder of GRUB (Greater Rochester Urban Bounty). It was her vision and tenacity that brought the farm to life. Every community member who has ever walked into the farm can attest to her hardworking spirit and completely tireless and selfless dedication to GRUB. In 2008, Ms. Edwards received national recognition for her GRUB work by being named a “Garden Crusader” by Gardener’s Supply. This program was created to honor those who are improving the world through gardening.

One of Ms. Edwards’ greatest hopes for the farm was that it would always be a place to teach and engage the neighborhood’s children. The Summer at the Vineyard program is a testament to her spirit of community and hope for a positive future for its youngest generations. Ms. Edwards passed away on September 4th, 2008, at the end of a hard-fought battle with cancer, and she will be greatly missed by the Rochester community.
what do we do at the vineyard?

The mission of RIT's University/Community Partnership is to support and propel the implementation of citizen-driven neighborhood revitalization activities in the city of Rochester while broadening and deepening the educational experience for RIT students. Students are given opportunities for community-based experiential learning, which allows them to utilize the skills gained through their course of study in a meaningful way. The RIT students and community members are co-equal partners as both learners and teachers.

The Summer at the Vineyard program was created through a partnership between the North East Block Club Alliance (NEBCA), Greater Rochester Urban Bounty (GRUB), and RIT, to provide a unique learning community for RIT students and youth from the
city's northeast neighborhoods. Activities were centered at the Vineyard, GRUB's 2.69 acre farm located on Sanders Street. Using knowledge gleaned from the previous summers, the challenge was to create an environment where everyone would learn together about sustainable urban agriculture, local food systems and nutrition. This was accomplished through the participants working together in the fields, learning in hands-on workshops and field trips. The farm work, spanning the entire summer, gave the group the chance to plant the seeds, water, weed, and tend to the plants throughout the hot summer days, pick the fully grown harvest, and sell the produce in the community. Principles of community development and civic engagement were also emphasized by focusing on the resident-led efforts that resulted in the creation of the farm itself.
meet the team

Brittany Bowman
Brittany felt her experience with the Summer at the Vineyard project taught her about “cooperation” and “hard work.” Brittany is a student at Joseph C. Wilson Magnet High School. She enjoys playing soccer and cheerleading. Her future plans are to go to college and have a career as a surgeon.

Nikki Bridges
This was Nikki’s second year at the Vineyard. She taught the team proper gardening techniques and her positive attitude made weeding easier for everyone. Nikki thought her work on the farm “really helps the community out.” Nikki attends Global Media Arts at Benjamin Franklin High School and would like to explore careers in community work.

Jazmin Castillo
This summer Jazmin found a sense of “responsibility” within herself and her leadership potential. Jazmin is a student at the Northeast College Preparatory School at Douglass Campus and has a passion for art. She has been a very active participant in the soccer program at the North Street Community Center.

Jamaal Fitzpatrick
Jamaal did a wonderful job offering tours to the community, showcasing all he has learned about agriculture and the Vineyard. He is a student at James Monroe High School and loves playing soccer there. Jamaal knows he can help teach other youth how to garden at his school’s program.
of students and youth

**Marques Green**

Marques is very interested in the field of agriculture and business. After the summer program, Marques enrolled in the nine-county region Agricultural Careers Camp series, offering monthly in-depth opportunities for him to gain experience and knowledge in related careers. Marques attends Dr. Freddie Thomas High School.

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**Mercy Kpor**

Mercy attends Global Media Arts at Benjamin Franklin High School. She said this summer's experience, "opened me up to try new things and eat vegetables I wouldn't try before." After the field trip to Cornell's Geneva Experiment Station, Mercy is now considering a career as a food critic. She would like to continue volunteering at the Vineyard.

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**José Morales**

José attends James Monroe High School. This summer's experience offered the opportunity for José's business skills to shine. He is a Youth Leader for the Bridges to Wellness Project in the northeast section of the city, a project designed to facilitate a community-based health assessment.

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**John Patterson**

John has been actively involved with the Vineyard program for several years. John's whole is family is devoted to this community farm. His sister Patrice came every day and was an eager participant in the program. John shared his great knowledge and history of the Vineyard to those who visited. John is a student at Joseph C. Wilson Magnet High School.
Lisa Barker
Lisa graduated from RIT in May with her degree in Photo Journalism. Lisa has been involved in several University/Community Partnership Projects for the past three years, especially utilizing her gift as a photo journalist, by contributing her photos to publications and teaching youth how to tell their stories and express their views through photography. This summer, Lisa was the coordinator for the RIT students and youth program and continued her participation through the fall of 2008. Lisa has felt a great commitment to the Vineyard, giving many hours of time to tending the farm, encouraging volunteers to come and work, and developing new connections with local businesses to purchase produce from the Vineyard. Lisa would like to continue to explore her passion for urban agriculture and community engagement.

Charlie Fuehrer
A third year Criminal Justice student, Charlie was recruited into a program he never knew existed and now describes it as an amazing experience that he would recommend to any college student. With a background in Navy ROTC, Charlie’s extensive training in leadership and teamwork helped to make him an integral part of the Vineyard group. Charlie valued the experience of being able to work alongside the youth. It enabled him to share his ideas with and learn from people coming from completely different backgrounds. “This experience has opened my eyes. I am now extremely interested in looking into similar opportunities or jobs working with youth in whatever city I end up in.” Charlie’s long-term goal is to become a military lawyer.

Emily Hughes
As a third year International Business and Marketing Student, Emily was extremely excited to be able to put what she has learned into action by lending her business background, extensive leadership education and enthusiasm to the summer program. This summer helped Emily see ‘endless possibilities in sustainability and peace.’ As a Resident Assistant and Women’s Senator, Emily’s involvement on the RIT campus is extensive. By getting to know the city on a much deeper level, she is glad to have developed a greater connection and commitment to Rochester beyond the brick walls of RIT. Emily’s experience with the Vineyard program has helped to shape and validate her ultimate goal of creating an outdoor leadership camp for urban youth.
Allison Ingalls

Allison has given extraordinary effort to GRUB, utilizing her knowledge and skills gained in her International Business and Marketing coursework and applying them with NEBCA’s interest in business planning for the Vineyard. Allison received the Carter Academic Service Entrepreneur (CASE) Award from the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Partnership Foundation to recognize her excellence in academic service learning and campus-community collaboration. Allison’s previous experience at the Vineyard provided assistance in farming techniques and setting up an electronic tracking system for the produce grown at the Vineyard. Allison graduated from RIT this summer and has since gone on to pursue graduate studies in Public Health at Emory University.

Christina Karas

As a fifth year Environmental Science major at RIT, Christina jumped at the opportunity to spend her summer working on a sustainable community farm. Outside of the chance to utilize knowledge gained in her course of study, Christina found the experience of getting to know youth from the community to be extremely valuable, as working with high-school youth made each day unique. She has continued her involvement with the youth at the Vineyard, and has begun working on her senior research project to develop a solar water heater for the Vineyard’s Agricultural Training Center. This project will create an innovative asset for the building and serve as a community project to learn about alternative energy and resource conservation.

Caitlin Kelsey

Caitlin Kelsey is a third year Urban and Community Studies major. She credits the experience of working at the Vineyard as an incredible opportunity to really learn course material—in the real world, in a hands-on situation. “While you can sit in a classroom and think you understand what is necessary to make a community function, nothing is as informative as actually working in that community and seeing firsthand all the factors that come into play. It has allowed me to formulate my own way of understanding how a community works.” Caitlin’s decision to pursue a future in community development and working with youth was a major outcome of her role in the Summer at the Vineyard program.
field trips

An important part of the summer activities was the inclusion of a weekly field trip, planned to further the participants' experience of learning about agriculture and its many facets. The field trips gave the participants the opportunity to expand their comfort levels by exploring new environments. For both the youth and the RIT students, these trips gave them exposure to a wide variety of agriculture-related industries and career possibilities. In Buffalo, they had the chance to see an entirely youth-run urban agriculture program and speak with its leaders. In Geneva, a field researcher took the group into his field, where everyone had the chance to pick, eat, and take home as many ears of fresh corn as they wanted. These field trips heightened participants awareness of the multiple dimensions and the complexities of local food systems.

farm to table

Jimmy Camillo, Head Chef at the Crystal Barn, a 5-star restaurant in Pittsford, NY, has been a loyal customer and volunteer of the Vineyard for many years. He offered the Summer at the Vineyard participants a unique field to table experience. Chef Jimmy invited the group to the restaurant’s commercial kitchen for a cooking lesson. Under his guidance, the group created a colorful feast using ten different varieties of vegetables they picked themselves at the Vineyard. Most youth were not accustomed to eating a variety of fresh vegetables, and they were tentative to try new foods. Through contributing to cooking, and then trying the dishes they prepared, the youth experienced a new level of connection to their food. Several youth expressed an interest exploring careers in culinary arts.
a visit from Dr. Destler

A special occasion this summer was a visit to the Vineyard by RIT President Destler and his wife Rebecca Johnson. The youth and RIT students were very proud to give them a tour of the farm and showcase all they had learned in the summer program. A group discussion followed the tour. It was a wonderful moment for everyone to talk about this valuable asset for the northeast neighborhoods, to have access to pesticide-free, locally grown produce. Everyone agreed this environment offers a tremendous opportunity for a learning community for RIT students and the area youth. The students and youth really enjoyed having time to meet the RIT President and his wife and hope to see them again.

continued connection to community

This year’s Summer at the Vineyard program ended three weeks before the anticipated date, due to an unanticipated change in funding. Though initially met with disappointment, this turned out to be an unprecedented positive learning opportunity for the participants. The collective commitment to the community kept the group working to bring the crops to harvest. They felt they started this project together and they needed to finish it together. At the end of the summer, everyone was still present, a remarkable achievement of the program’s ultimate goal: to connect the students and youth to the farm, to their community, and to each other.

Since that time, RIT students and youth continue their connections in a variety of ways. They have stayed in touch through social media, cell phones and getting together at the North Street Community Center. RIT students and youth came to the “Put the Farm to Bed Day” to clean up the farm and close it for the winter. Two youth and one RIT student have become involved in a community health assessment project focused on the northeast neighborhoods. A group went to a community agricultural conference in Buffalo. The continued sense of commitment to this community-led program and partnership has endured.
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