

Good Neighbors

Community Spirit is Alive and Growing at Stonehill College

Stonehill College is putting its commitment to community service in action with a unique new program – a sustainable, organic farm.

Located on two rolling acres across from the campus in Easton, The Farm grows and distributes produce to local organizations to feed families in need.

This past summer fresh fruits and vegetables were provided to 2,000 people through three organizations – Saint Paul's Table at Father Bill's and MainSpring, the family centers at Old Colony YMCA and My Brother's Keeper.

The Farm also benefits the college by increasing the Stonehill community's awareness of food justice issues and by serving as the focal point for a Learning Community this academic year. Stonehill staff, students, alumni and faculty are encouraged to work the land together for the common good.

"It's rewarding. We're raising spirits of people, raising a pride, not only a school pride, but an area pride, a town pride," said Paul DaPonte, vice president of mission.

The Farm is DaPonte's brainchild. The idea came to him while he was volunteering in Brockton last year.

"I discovered there are areas in Brockton and neighboring communities which qualify for a status of a food desert," he said.

A food desert is a region where people have easy access to convenience stores and fast food but lack access to affordable, healthy food such as fruits, vegetables and grains.

"One thing we have on this 384-acre campus is land," DaPonte noted. "I thought we could reserve an acre or so to plant wholesome, locally grown, organic foods for our neighbors in need. At the same time, we could increase a sense of well-being in Stonehill students and employees."

"We try and stay aware of the clientele," DaPonte said. "The Old Colony YMCA, for instance, feeds some 35 families. So we try



Student Michelle Kozminski

to grow veggies high in vitamin B, which is essential for pregnant women and young children."

Recipes accompany the vegetables. This past summer when The Farm staff dropped off boxes of kale, for instance, they tucked recipes for kale soup or pasta salad into the box. A box of bell peppers might include a recipe for stuffed peppers.

Farm manager Bridget Meigs is passionate about The Farm and sustainable, organic farming in general.

"Growing food is beautiful in and of itself," Meigs said. "It's amazing to have a sustainable, organic farm like this at a college because of the connections that students start to make with food justice issues, sustainability."

Each week from May to October, The Farm delivered enough fresh produce to the three local partners to provide at least one portion of produce to the individuals or families they serve.

The Farm staff consists of Meigs and two paid student interns, environmental science and math major Michelle Kozminski and philosophy major Brian Switzer, who each worked 20 hours per week.

"The Farm is an example of what a great idea, a lot of hard work and lots of support can lead to: making a successful difference in the community," Kozminski said.

"It inspires people to become involved and make a change, and it really seems to follow our school motto: To create a more just and compassionate world," she added.

Switzer became involved through a Learning Community called "Change the World," which required students to work five hours a week in a nature-based community service.

"The Farm is a great place to learn how to farm, to be outside or to do community work," Switzer said. "Plus, it's right off campus. So kids without cars can just come here and volunteer."

The fields are currently being prepared for winter and in March, The Farm's second year will get underway. For more information, visit www.stonehillblogs.org/farm or call 508-565-1551.



Vice President Paul DaPonte

About Stonehill College

Stonehill College is a welcoming, academically challenging community of 2,500 students on a beautiful campus in Easton. The college offers more than 80 majors and minors in the liberal arts, sciences and business. At Stonehill, students learn to think, act and lead with courage toward the creation of a more just and compassionate world.

In addition to The Farm, Stonehill offers a wide range of community service programs, including service-learning projects for students and research that benefits local organizations.

In addition, the college's Center for Nonprofit Management brings together nonprofit and community leaders for learning, skill-building, networking and research.