

Contact: Sarah Ward
South Chicago Art Center
(773) 731-9287
sarah@happyartcenter.org
www.happyartcenter.org

THE SOUTH CHICAGO ART CENTER LAUNCHES COMMUNITY GARDEN INITIATIVE

ART PROGRAM TEACHES YOUTH HEALTHY NUTRITION THROUGH GARDEN PROGRAM; PRODUCE DISTRIBUTED TO NEIGHBORHOOD FOOD BANK

CHICAGO, IL – July 22, 2010... The South Chicago Art Center is proud to announce the return of its annual summer community garden initiative which grows produce that is shared with families throughout Chicago's Southeast side neighborhood. The garden grows a wide variety of vegetables and fruits such as tomatoes, cucumbers, and raspberries, along with herbs like basil and dill. So far this summer, donations to the Ada McKinley food pantry have included bags of freshly picked collards, kale, Swiss chard, radishes, and broccoli.

Launched in 2004 as a response to the high numbers of families living below national poverty levels, the South Chicago Art Center community garden project aims to provide community members with fresh organic produce, encourage residents to grow their own family crops, and educate South Chicago youth on the importance of nutrition in an interactive and simple way. Sarah Ward, founder and executive director of the Art Center and garden initiative, describes the garden as "a place for community members to come together for the common purpose of growing and doing something positive. In a racially divided and gang infested area, [the garden] is a neutral area." She also comments that the garden classes for youth allow them to learn "how to grow and live off the land," uncommon skills in an urban setting.

There is a high need for this fertile land and the food it produces in particular, due to minimal fresh produce in the area combined with low income levels. According to Claretian Associates' Strategic Planning Research, the median family income level in South Chicago is just over \$45,000 per year. The garden is able to provide fresh food to those who might not otherwise have access to it or be able to afford it.

Gladys Howell, director of the Ada McKinley food pantry, can speak to this need first hand from her experience helping South Chicago residents. "It's been a blessing for the people to get fresh vegetables," Howell says. "The thing is, people don't have the money to buy fresh produce. We've heard feedback from people about how they love getting the fresh produce."

Donations to the pantry are made one to two times a week and consist of whatever is ready to be harvested that morning. Additionally, the Art Center holds a weekly cooking class on Thursdays for youth in the summer art program. Produce from the garden is used to create simple and healthy dishes with the students, who are then given recipes and enough of the ingredients to take home and make the dish for their families.

While the summer programming ends in late August, the South Chicago Art Center continues its year-round services in the fall with after-school programs in the Center and classes during the day in local schools. Additionally, the Art Center will be running open studios and workshops in Pilsen from mid September through October as part of Chicago Artists Month.

The South Chicago Art Center was founded in 2001 to provide a safe place for children after school; to bring arts education to local impoverished schools; to stimulate the imaginations of participants of all ages; to cultivate a sense of aesthetics; to boost self-esteem and intellectual curiosity; to decrease incidence of crime and substance abuse; and to promote friendship, solidarity and empowerment in the community.

For more information on programs or to learn more about the South Chicago Art Center, please visit www.happyartcenter.org or call (773) 731-9287.

###