

7-26-2017

Table of Plenty

University of Dayton

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Recommended Citation

University of Dayton, "Table of Plenty" (2017). *News Releases*. 10949.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/10949

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Wednesday July 26, 2017

Table of Plenty

A project involving the University of Dayton Hanley Sustainability Institute is turning heads and stopping traffic.

"A couple of people have come up to me after driving by, and one lady stopped her car to ask, 'What is this? What do you do here?'" said Sarah Rugwiro of Dayton's Twin Towers neighborhood. "(After) telling her all about it, (she said), 'This is so cool.' She was so excited."

All of the excitement is about the work the institute, Mission of Mary Cooperative and East End Community Services are doing to transform a one-time Dayton public school site into a flourishing urban oasis.

After a year, Lincoln Hill Gardens has produced nearly 2 tons of food for 80 families, plus more to be sold at local markets. The proceeds go toward developing Lincoln Hill Garden, according to Stephen Mackell, urban farm manager at Mission of Mary Cooperative.

"Through the 2017 growing season, families are getting 10-15 pounds of vegetables a week, plus they are getting in the habit of cooking and eating fresh food all of the time," Mackell said. "We expect to have another 20,000 pounds combined from the spring and summer growing seasons."

But it's not just about the food.

"I'm really excited about my family spending some quality time outside in the garden, getting them out of the house," Rugwiro said. "And, I think it's really a nice way to bring the neighborhood together, because in this day and age, people don't generally know their neighbors at all. Having a place where neighbors can meet and have something positive to do is nice."

In addition to the urban garden, the property will be a natural playground, according to Abby Lisjak, the Hanley Sustainability

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Institute intern for the Lincoln Hill Garden project. Tree stumps will be strategically transformed into climbing elements. Swings will hang from trees. Slides will be built into hills.

"I've been learning the importance of nature for childhood development and the benefits of a playscape that's different than a traditional playground," said Lisjak, a mechanical engineering major with a minor in human rights. "This is a great fit with my passions and confirmation I want to work in this area. I've always really liked the science, math and process of engineering, but I've sought ways to use engineering to make a difference, to use human rights as a guide to apply engineering."

Approximately, 55 students from engineering, biology, geology, computer science, human rights, dietetics, visual arts, the Fitz Center, and Rivers Institute work at Lincoln Hill Gardens. They are assisting with site design, surveys, soil restoration, and logo design and branding. Recently, a group of students installed sensors at the site to monitor garden temperatures to ensure optimal growing conditions.

"Urban farming is important because many urban areas lack the necessary infrastructure to provide residents access to fresh, healthful foods and lush, open green space," said Kate Ervin, East End Community Services director of community development. "In addition to the urban farm, our hope is to ultimately transform the land into a natural, educational and recreational green space that's easily accessible to those living in the city."

The University is actively fundraising for this and other University sustainability initiatives, which were launched with a gift from The George and Amanda Hanley Foundation in 2014.

"It is our intent with this gift to allow students and faculty throughout the University to think creatively about how to put their knowledge to work in real-world projects that extend learning beyond the classroom," said George Hanley, a 1977 business graduate and member of the University of Dayton board of trustees, when the University announced the gift. "We want to educate and prepare students for careers — in every sector — that will help create a more sustainable future."

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For more information on supporting the Lincoln Hill Gardens project, contact Derrick Dukes, assistant vice president for corporate and foundation relations, at 937-229-4523 or ddukes1@udayton.edu. To learn more about supporting the University of Dayton Hanley Sustainability Institute and its students' projects, contact Don Pair at 937-229-3295 or dpair1@udayton. For interviews, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of news and communications, at 937-229-3391 or srobinson1@udayton.edu.

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