Funding Success!

Dillard University’s OCR received funding from the Greater New Orleans Foundation to increase food and nutrition education in the Gentilly area through innovative gardening and food access programs. As a result, 600 K-8th grade students have had the opportunity to plant, nurture and harvest produce which they and their families could consume, along with learn how to cook in healthy ways. Healthy cooking demonstrations were provided for Pilotland Neighborhood Association, Sugar Hill Neighborhood Association, Fairmont Park N.A., Gentilly Heights-East N.A., Pentecost Baptist Church “Golden Agers”, Dillard University Public Health students, and over 300 participants that attended the 7th Annual Health and Sports Festival. Additionally, three Healthy Food Family Night events were held at Langston Hughes Charter School whereby parents and students sampled healthy fresh vegetables meals from produce grown in the schools garden.

Since fall 2012, third and fourth graders have participated in a mentorship program with Dillard through the Seed to Table Project wherein Dr. Amy Lesen’s botany students paired up with Langston Hughes Academy (LHA) students to study garden science while sowing seeds about college and careers. The students created the Dreamkeeper Garden and received support through funding by Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Louisiana and a partnership with Edible Schoolyard New Orleans.

While creating these initiatives and drawing attention to the critical issues of health and access to healthy foods, the OCR has been able to successfully leverage the Greater New Orleans Foundations funding to secure partnerships from LSU Health and Science Center, Blue Cross/Blue Shield Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, other grant funding to expand the department’s range and efforts has been acquired from AARP, Amerigroup Real Solutions, and Daughters of Charity.

A New Year’s Message to all our Readers

On behalf of Dillard University and the Office of Community Relations (OCR), I wish all readers and residents of New Orleans a very Happy New Year!

2013 was an exciting and eventful year for the OCR. We saw enthusiastic participation from the community in the various events organized. These events included health fairs and healthy cooking demonstrations, community outings, an annual housing fair and other activities which allowed residents to be involved in their own betterment. Youth were also engaged and participated in creating gardens at their local schools.

I must also acknowledge the outstanding contribution of the neighborhood associations, event sponsors, and all other partners that supported us in achieving our goals. This collaborative effort and insight played a vital role in the planning and execution of each activity.

All achievements notwithstanding, we are aware that this is just the beginning of the journey to fostering healthy and happy neighborhoods. Hence, in 2014, we are committed to not only continuing our efforts, but also to adopting a more holistic approach to our initiatives. We are determined to improve the mind, body, and soul health experience for our community, and plan to offer a comprehensive range of educational and human services.

I wish you health and prosperity in 2014, and look forward to your continued support and participation.

Warm wishes

Nick Harris
Office of Community Relations, Dillard University
**DU Cheerleaders Spread Cheer**

Dillard University’s cheerleaders took time out during their finals week to give back to people who are less fortunate in the community. The cheerleaders donated their time and money to provide healthy meals to some families, and also helped the elderly decorate for Christmas. The various families were referred to by ministers from the community.

“It felt good to visit the lady whose husband died. I plan to go back and visit her next semester,” said Miss Sophomore Ashley Green, who visited Ms. Clara James.

Nick Harris, Director of Office of Community Relations at Dillard, worked in conjunction with the students as well as several local pastors in Gentilly and the Lower 9th Ward to organize the visits. “It really meant a lot to me to see how much they enjoyed giving back to the community, and I think all of our students should be involved in this level of giving. I hope we can continue this tradition during the holidays, especially Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter,” said Harris.

Rev. Lionel Davis, Pastor of Pentecost Baptist Church in the Pilotland neighborhood of New Orleans, lauded the efforts of the students and Dillard University. “As I contemplate about this time of the season, the things that Mr. Harris and Dillard have done for our community have been amazing. I don’t know where we would be without Dillard’s personal hand.”

**Toy Giveaway by NFL Player LaRon Byrd**

In an effort to expand youth services and further promote healthy lifestyles, Nick Harris and the Office of Community Relations have connected with LaRon Byrd, NFL Professional Football Player for the Arizona Cardinals. LaRon is a graduate of Hahnville High School in Hahnville, Louisiana and has been consistent with giving back to the community. Recently, he held his 2nd Annual Toy Giveaway on December 24, 2013 at the Fashion Plantation Golf Course Club House in Hahnville, Louisiana. During the event, over 800 children received toys and were greeted warmly by LaRon and members of his organization. In the works are plans to host a weekend sports camp to focus on exercise, healthy eating, mentoring, and self-empowerment.
DU 7th Annual Housing & Home Improvement Fair

In keeping with its commitment to rebuilding the Gentilly neighborhood, Dillard University’s Office of Community Relations hosted the 7th Annual Housing and Home Improvement Fair on September 28th, 2013. The five-hour event, which was held on the Dillard University campus, received a tremendous response from residents and vendors. Approximately 400 residents and 70 vendors participated in the event.

At the fair, residents got an opportunity to attend workshops conducted by experts on various topics such as mortgage insurance, home financing options, foreclosure avoidance, and energy efficiency. They could also interact with the vendors, including banks, mortgage lenders, realtors, nonprofit housing agencies, and legal services who had set up booths on the university’s campus. In addition, they could seek assistance on Hurricane Katrina restoration and repair claims from Road Home representatives, who were present throughout the event.

Overall, the housing fair received a thumbs-up from all stakeholders. Workshop participants found the sessions engaging and informative. Vendors, too, were satisfied with the management of the event, and were happy to have been able to interact with the residents and share information about their offerings with potential buyers.

“I was clueless about home repair and financing. This seminar helped me understand some of the complexities that have been stressing me out.”

– A participant

DU Mind, Body, and Soul Health Experience

In December 2013, DU OCR organized a health outreach event targeted at increasing awareness about health-related matters among African-American men. Around 120 residents participated in this event and interacted with representatives of different healthcare providers.

Residents got access to a wealth of educational information about various chronic illnesses and treatment options. They were also made aware of the importance of regular health check-ups in preventing various illnesses. In addition, they received guidance about health insurance under the Affordable Care Act.
DU OCR and employees from Langston Hughes Academy (LHA) partnered to organize Healthy Food Nights for students and their parents. Stalls demonstrating healthy cooking techniques were put up and attendees also had a chance to taste different healthy foods. In fact, some of the vegetables were grown by LHA students in their Dreamkeeper garden.

The events were a huge success and drew over 300 students and parents. Parents were delighted to discover that their children enjoyed eating vegetables.

The Healthy Food Nights were another instance of the long partnership between the university and the school to promote healthy eating habits among school children. Since 2012, LHA students and DU Botany students have been working together to build the school garden.

Golden Agers’ Program

In partnership with Reverend Davis and the Pentecost Baptist Church, the OCR supports the Golden Agers Seniors Program. This initiative provides senior citizens with opportunities to participate in exercise, eating of healthy foods, medical assistance, other related resources and activities. The program, which serves an average of 30 seniors weekly, allows individuals to maintain their independence, share stories through fellowship with others, and remain active. Future plans include outreach to increase senior participation and adding a second class during the week.
DU OCR Featured on National Public Radio

DU OCR’s Nick Harris spoke with the National Public pertinent to Gentilly: the increase in chronic health problems among community members and the lack of access to nutritious food and healthcare. The interview was aired in November 2013.

As a part of the interview, Mr. Harris and one of the students of Langston Hughes Academy took the NPR correspondent around the community garden on the school’s premises. The LHA Dreamkeeper Garden is one of the community gardens in the area that is being developed with support from the university’s OCR and Botany students.

The positive impact of the collaboration between the university and the school was readily apparent: the school students had gained knowledge not only about the scientific aspects of plant growth and plant care, but also about nutrition and healthy eating habits. In addition, like Mr. Harris pointed out, “It’s giving our students more exposure to the community, and giving young kids in an urban community exposure to a college campus to let them know what the next step is in life.”


DU OCR’s Five Areas of Focus

Through the successful community engagement in Gentilly, Lower 9th Ward and Central City neighborhoods, churches, local business and service organizations, the OCR has established five key areas to focus its outreach activities for 2014.

Access to affordable healthcare services, being the number one concern of many senior citizens and low-income residents, is an urgent need. The OCR will host several Health Fairs in these communities to reach residents that may have transportation challenges to seek annual medical exams.
Upcoming Events

Below is a preview of scheduled events and workshops presented by the Office of Community Relations for the year 2014:

Community Events

- Sunday, Feb. 17th - Black History Month "Men's Health Initiative"
- Saturday, March 8th - African American Men Health Fair
- Saturday, June 28th - 8th Annual Health and Sports Festival
- Saturday, Sept. 27 - 8th Annual Housing and Home Improvement Fair

Workshops (offered in Gentilly and at various Public Housing locations)

- Financial Literacy Tour
- Security and Life Safety
- Homeownership Transition
- Life Skill Training Workshops (for residents at Fischer, Guste High Rise and Marrero Commons)
- Youth Leadership and Career Path Workshop
- Entergy New Orleans "Tips of Saving" Health and Nutrition Workshop

Gentilly Neighborhood Association Team

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