

Project Self-Sufficiency Community Heroes—Blair Academy Day of Service



A team of 100 students from Blair Academy recently descended on Project Self-Sufficiency's campus as part of the private school's Day of Service, a new initiative spearheaded by Head of School Christopher Fortunato. The students assisted with the installation of three new vegetable gardens on the non-profit agency's campus, assembled and stained picnic tables which will be distributed to low-income families served by Project Self-Sufficiency, spread mulch on the daycare center's playgrounds, and worked on other maintenance projects. By the end of the day, 30 raised beds graced the three new gardens, and over 100 tomato plants in containers were distributed around the campus. The gardens will provide fresh vegetables to the agency's low-income clientele for years to come.



The teens from Blair Academy volunteered at a variety of sites as part of Blair Academy's inaugural Day of Service. Noted Blair Academy Head of School Christopher Fortunato, "I have developed such service programs at both Harvard and Providence College with the goal of galvanizing students and faculty around a shared commitment to service and building strong relationships both within and outside the school community. A single day of service is simply a starting point for raising enthusiasm and understanding among Blair students of the needs and opportunities in the communities surrounding Blair Academy. I envision that Blair and its faculty and students, while part of a private school nonetheless have a shared public purpose and obligation to be good neighbors. Project Self-Sufficiency, with its long-standing and meaningful success in



providing individual and families with the tools to move past life challenges is an excellent partner for us in teaching our students how effective non-profit organizations can have great impact on the lives of others."

A single community garden was planted at Project Self-Sufficiency several years ago thanks to agency supporter Frances Gould Naftal, who

originated the idea and supplied the necessary materials. Frances, her husband, Marvin, and children Samantha and Brian Naftal, own and operate Flatbrook Farms in Sussex County. For the garden installation on May 16th, the entire family pitched in, donating wood, nails and soil to create the raised beds and even hiring a backhoe. "The community has come together for this project in such an unusual and unbelievable way," remarked Frances. "It's really quite remarkable."



Members of the community were so inspired by Blair Academy's Day of Service at Project Self-Sufficiency that several other individuals and organizations joined the effort, including Kuperus Farmside Gardens & Florist, the Rutgers Master Gardeners of Sussex County, 3 C Sons, Cahill's Farm, Dale's Market, Heaven Hill Farms, building contractor David Makarevich, Mohawk Gardens, Sussex Honda and Intercar Mercedes Benz.

"Getting fresh food to low-income families in our area is a constant challenge, yet we live in an area of New Jersey renowned for its lush farmland and the fresh produce available at local markets," remarked Deborah Berry-Toon, Executive Director of Project Self-Sufficiency. "We are humbled by the efforts of all of the teenage volunteers from Blair Academy who have inspired so many others to come together today to help to address the issue of hunger in our community in a meaningful, long-lasting way. They have helped to break the cycle of poverty by providing food to local families, and demonstrated the true meaning of community service."

Professional gardeners Louise van der Haeghen, Mary-Ann Doolittle and Kathy Jameson of the 3 C Sons Farm offered their expertise, along with a truck load of manure, to the garden installation. "We're offering our expertise and directing the kids today," commented Louise van der Haeghen. "We all believe in what Project Self-Sufficiency does."



May, 2014

"Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great Mosaic in the end" ... Alice Paul