

Resident Engagement Case Study: Famicos Foundation

The Famicos Foundation is a Cleveland community development organization serving the Glenville, Hough and Collinwood neighborhoods. The organization is a non-profit that functions as an affordable housing developer and social services provider. Through resident services and neighborhood outreach, Famicos helps families achieve home ownership, prevent homelessness, reach educational benchmarks, and keep youth engaged in positive activities. Famicos' vision is to improve the quality of life in Cleveland through neighborhood revitalization and community organizing.

In an effort to improve quality of life and residential health in its service area, Famicos has implemented projects focused on the reuse of vacant land. The once blighted lots are being transformed into green space, small parks, and community gardens. Through the ReImagining Cleveland program launched in 2010, Famicos has put many vacant lots to reuse¹. One such lot is the home of the newly established Gateway105 Farmers' Market. Supporting community projects such as these, Famicos has worked to engage all residents (youth as well as families) in various sustainability focused workshops.

Student Outreach

As part of their community outreach plan, Famicos targeted local high school students. The foundation's Community Organizer, a graduate of Glenville High School, maintained a strong relationship with one of the school's science teachers. While some students were preparing for the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), a standardized test that must be passed for graduation, the students who successfully passed their OGTs, were engaged in the Table, Set, Go program piloted by Famicos. By the end of the program, all 15 students were participating in the lessons. The group met three times a week from February to April.

The program curriculum was developed collaboratively with NEO Restoration Alliance, a nonprofit that promotes market gardening and green job development. The lessons covered topics such as local foods, hydroponics, composting and vermicomposting, GardenSoxx, and rain

ReImagining Cleveland

Supported by a strong, citywide, public non-profit partnership, and hundreds of residents, ReImagining Cleveland is a vacant land reuse initiative that creates sustainable solutions to vacancy while building a movement of solidarity and stewardship.

ReImagining Cleveland views vacant land as a raw asset. The alternative land use strategies employed in this initiative return vacant land to productive use in ways that complement the City of Cleveland's long-term development objectives and empowers residents to reclaim their neighborhoods, become ambassadors for their communities, and start regaining a sense of pride and value.

ReImagining Cleveland's innovative land reuse projects include vineyards, orchards, market gardens, pocket parks, and stream bed reconstruction projects within the City of Cleveland. The initiative also enables Cleveland residents to acquire vacant lots adjacent to their homes, helping to stabilize property values and making our streets safer, more enjoyable places to call home¹.

¹ <http://reimagingcleveland.org/about/>

barrels. At the end of the three months, the students showcased their knowledge by hosting a Sustainability Awareness Day. The event motivated students to take an active role in their education. The student group set up tables at the Free Clinic (during an inside farmers' market) prior to the event to practice sharing the information in their displays. During The Sustainability Awareness Day the students interacted with 32 community members as well as representatives from the Cuyahoga County Council, City of Cleveland Office of Sustainability and The USDA.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Gardens Under Glass

Gardens Under Glass is an urban agriculture project located in the Galleria at Erieview shopping mall. In 2010, Vicky Poole, the Galleria's marketing and events director, and Jack Hamilton, a gallery owner, teamed up to turn vacant retail spaces into an "urban eco village". Poole had worked on her grandfather's farm and saw the opportunity to use the building's existing features as a greenhouse. The pair received a \$30,000 start-up grant from the Civic Innovation Lab to begin the garden.² The project uses hydroponics, a method of growing plants in nutrient enhanced water rather than in soil. By delivering nutrients directly through the water, faster plant growth occurs. Plants also grow to a larger size due to the optimal growing conditions. Growing plants hydroponically utilizes an indoor, controlled environment, where temperature, humidity, and light can be controlled. This made the climate controlled mall an excellent location for the initiative.

Initially, it was hard to capture and maintain the students' attention and interest. However, meeting with the group frequently helped cultivate a relationship between the students and the Famicos' staff. In order to spark interest with the students, the group took field trips to learn about sustainability initiatives throughout Cleveland. One of the students' favorite fieldtrip was to the Gardens' Under Glass, an innovative urban agriculture project located downtown². The facility showcases greenhouse hydroponics. The students learned how they grow lettuce, herbs, and other produce year round.



A Glenville High School student explains his hydroponic display at the Sustainability Awareness Day hosted by Famicos.

² <http://www.gardensunderglass.net/gardensunderglass/Welcome.html>;
http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2010/02/galleria_has_gardens_now.html

Rain Barrel Workshops

A rain barrel collects and stores rainwater that would otherwise be lost to runoff. Diverting this water helps protect the environment from increased erosion and decreases the polluting impact to streams. A rain barrel can save about 1,300 gallons of water during peak summer months³. The rain barrel workshops are important in the Glenville and Hough neighborhoods. Doan Brook, which runs through the neighborhoods, overflows often during heavy rainfall periods. The area has also suffered from flooding and erosion problems. Rain barrels can help divert this excess water flow, especially if a majority of the community adopts this practice. The City has promoted the use of rain barrels through the Summer Rain Barrel Program, which also employs high school students to assemble and distribute the rain barrels throughout the city.⁴

In order to promote the use of rain barrels, Famicos sponsored workshops to educate participants about rain barrels and provide them with one at no cost. The workshops were organized at a resident's home and typically had 10 to 12 participants. Students from the Glenville High School program attended the workshops as student teachers and helped Famicos run the event. In conjunction with the City's rain barrel program, Famicos hopes to distribute 75 barrels to the Glenville and Hough communities this year.

In addition to the residential events, Famicos has organized rain barrel workshops at Gateway105 Farmer's Market. An educator from the NEO Restoration Alliance led the workshops. Attendees were given information on the importance of rain barrel usage. With the help of the instructor, the group put together their rain barrels, drilling inlet and outlet holes and installing a mesh screen to keep out debris.



A rain barrel workshop held at the Gateway105 Farmer's Market in the Glenville neighborhood.

City of Cleveland Summer Rain Barrel Program

The Summer Rain Barrel Program provides City residents with rain barrels at no cost. The program is a collaborative effort between the City's Office of Sustainability, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, the Mayor's Youth Summer Employment Program, the Cleveland Division of Water, and local Community Development Corporations (CDCs). Homeowners receive a rain barrel that is assembled and installed by high school students. Residents contact their local CDC to participate in the program.⁴

³ <http://www.epa.gov/region3/p2/what-is-rainbarrel.pdf>

⁴ <http://slavicvillage.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2012-Rain-Barrel-Information-Sheet.pdf>



Challenges and Lessons Learned

Garnering interest and driving attendance at new community events can be a challenge. Famicos found that hosting workshops at its facilities will not result in a successful event without doing outreach at the street and block level. Famicos has found, however, that there will always be neighborhood advocates willing to spread the word about programs. These are the people that will recruit their neighbors to come over for workshops. The results are two-fold: this technique spreads awareness, and also builds community.

Rain barrels were decorated by Glenville High School and Hawken Middle School students.

Garden Soxx Workshop

The Sustainable Cleveland 2019 initiative⁵ has named 2012 the “Year of Local Food”. In keeping with this theme, Famicos has hosted GardenSoxx workshops that promote local food and urban agriculture. GardenSoxx are mesh bags that contain soil and provide an easy way to grow vegetables at home. They require little maintenance and can be placed on any surface, including concrete or cement⁶. Famicos conducted the first workshop at the Gateway105 Farmer’s Market. Participants received four GardenSoxx and free vegetables provided by Schuster’s Westview Gardens. The twenty families that participated were also given a lesson on the concept of GardenSoxx, how they work, and best planting schemes. Participants completed a pre-survey on their prior growing knowledge and experience. Famicos is planning to follow-up with participants by meeting with them and checking on the plant growth. Using Garden Soxx is a viable growing alternative to traditional urban gardening. It is especially convenient for the elderly, disabled and the working.



Sustainable Cleveland 2019

SC2019 is a 10- year initiative for transforming Cleveland into a “green city on a blue lake”. The initiative engages a broad set of residents and stakeholders through 25 working groups. The culmination year, 2019, is the 50th anniversary of the infamous Cuyahoga River fire. Every year leading up to 2019 will focus on one sustainability issue, such as local food, renewable energy, zero waste, and clean water.⁵

⁵ <http://sustainablecleveland.org/>

⁶ <http://www.urbanorganicohio.com/gardensoxx.html>



Garden Soxx display at Famicos Sustainability Awareness Day.

Moving Forward

Over all, Famicos views its residential engagement strategy as a comprehensive way to teach residents healthy lifestyle strategies, build community, improve the neighborhood's ecological footprint, and contribute to Famicos' larger vacant land reuse and community greening efforts. Later this year, the organization plans to host composting and vermicomposting workshops. Next year, Famicos hopes to develop a comprehensive approach to delivering their sustainability information and workshops to the larger Glenville and Hough neighborhoods.

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