

# NLI NEIGHBORHOOD LEADER

Neighborhood Leadership Institute *Greater Cleveland's Connection to Neighborhood Leadership and Community Engagement*

## NLI Organizes Community Garden at A.J. Rickoff School in Mt. Pleasant

Fall 2009  
Volume V, Issue 3

by Mark McClain (Class 21)

“I never tasted a grapefruit before!” exclaimed one young Mt. Pleasant gardener as he savored a juicy section of the spherical citrus. Another youth tasted fresh cherries for the first time.

That is largely the purpose of this effort: to awaken the interest of a new generation in fresh produce. Of course, the grapefruit and cherries were not grown in the garden that these youth were helping to cultivate, but it gave them a taste of what is to come: fresh produce from the ground—produce that they will have helped to grow.

The New Sardis-A.J. Rickoff Community Garden is a joint effort to bring to the Mt. Pleasant community fresh produce and a knowledge of how to grow it.

The Neighborhood Leadership Institute brought together New Sardis Primitive Baptist Church, A.J. Rickoff School, the City of Cleveland's Summer Sprout Program, and the Ohio State Extension Program to help make it happen.

More than 25 community members signed up to garden, obtaining their own 4' x 8' garden boxes, seeds, plants and helpful instructions on what to do with them. Countless other community members have also stopped in occasionally to help.

Gardeners harvested cabbage, collards, hot and sweet peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, pole beans, squash, carrots, sweet basil and more—all without having to buy them in the store.

Of course, participants have learned bounty does not come without effort. Principal Lori Durham of A.J. Rickoff made land available for the garden, and children from the school came out to help.

The Mt. Pleasant Community Zone donated money to purchase wood and garden equipment. Deacons at New Sardis provided the saw and helped cut the 2 x 16 wood planks to build the boxes in which the vegetables are grown.



Contractor Marco Waller provided drills and nails, and his crew supervised the construction of more than 20 of the boxes. Adults and youth worked to put the boxes together and fill them with soil donated by the City of Cleveland Summer Sprout Program and a landscaping company.

Volunteers helped to water the garden at least twice a week from a nearby fire hydrant. Mt. Pleasant resident Grace Waite Jones donated fertilizer to help the plants grow tall.

“My hope is that this garden will grow into a very important part of this community,” said **Mark McClain** (Class 21), NLI's director of health and environmental initiatives.

“In these unpredictable times we all need to know how to be self-sufficient, and learning how to grow our own food moves us in that direction.”

Call Mark at the NLI office if you too want to participate in the 2010 garden effort.

# Grassroots Leadership



**Don Slocum**  
Executive Director

## Leadership Link

NLI staff members **Jacqueline Gillon** and **Mark McClain** presented at the 2009 Bioneers Cleveland conference in November (see page 3).

For more information about the conference and to find out about the activities of Bioneers in Northeast Ohio, visit the Bioneers Cleveland Web site:

[www.bioneerscleveland.org](http://www.bioneerscleveland.org)

The Neighborhood Leadership Institute exists to develop grassroots leadership that will contribute to rebuilding the bonds of community and improving the quality of life for neighborhood residents throughout the Greater Cleveland area.

## Environmental Call to Action

*Note from Don: For this issue, I'm turning over my column to **Mark McClain** (Class 21), NLI's director of health and environmental initiatives. Mark, who has had quite a bit of experience speaking from the pulpit, has chosen to convey his message by way of a parable.*

### "The Parable of the Deer"

by Mark McClain

A few months ago I entertained a few of my Facebook friends with an entry about a deer that ate my mustard green plants from my yard.

It was a tongue-in-cheek account of how I felt when resources that I claimed as my own were used by someone else.

The response was fairly significant for a Facebook thread, with no fewer than 50 comments about what should be done to the interloper that was doing simply what nature had designed it to do, feed itself and sustain itself.

The consensus was that I should have by now had a freezer full of venison.

The parable of the deer is important.

The deer was only doing what a deer does. Live off the land, with minimal impact.

And, the deer has done a much better job than we have in fitting into nature's design.

I've never seen an obese deer. It eats only what it needs at the time and continues along its way. Sustainable consumption. It doesn't leave empty cans, plastic bottles or candy wrappers in its wake. Its car-

bon footprint is negligible, probably limited to the effluvium residue that it deposits discreetly in the woods. Y'all know what I mean.

We, on the other hand, have been much less graceful. We have ravaged our ecosystem with minimum efforts to replenish the place over which God has given us stewardship. We have polluted our land. Our air is polluted, as is our water.

We were warned of the effects of our actions for many years but have failed to react, sweeping the effects of our ignorance under the proverbial rug.

Well, unfortunately, there are some people who live under that rug. And as NLC-trained leaders, the people under the rug are most likely your constituency.

It has come the time in the course of human history when the environmental justice axis intersects the day-to-day survival axis.

It is incumbent upon you to let your constituency know that the world has shrunk to a size that what people do far away from you, or down the street from you, can severely affect their survival on this planet.

And as in the parable of the deer, your constituency could be the first candidate for sacrifice.

Therefore, our concern for the day-to-day survival of grassroots people must necessarily include environmental considerations. What will they eat? What will they drink? Where and how will they live? How will they survive?

We must educate and mobilize our constituency on the issue of environmental justice.

# Leadership in Action

## **NLI Staff Make Presentations at Bioneers Cleveland Conference**

by Mark McClain (Class 21)

Cleveland, for the third year in a row, sponsored the nationally acclaimed Bioneers Conference, a conference that concentrates on global environmental and social justice issues.

The Bioneers effort, originating out of California, has been in existence for over 20 years. Each year parts of the conference are satellite-beamed from the Bioneers' home city to nearly 20 cities across the country. Local Bioneers sites complement the beamed sessions with local workshops.

This year Cleveland's conference was held November 5-7 at the Cleveland Convention Center and Cleveland State University's Levin College of Urban Affairs.

This year's conference focused on Northeastern Ohio's Local Food Systems. The conference examined creating sustainable, healthy food opportunities and the interconnections between water, energy, transportation, education, economics, community development, and culture.

The conference also showcased the production, distribution, nutrition, and financial viability of growing, selling and eating local food.

New this year was the Sustainability Scholars Day, where Bioneers Cleveland partnered with Cleveland's MC<sup>2</sup> STEM School (Metropolitan Cleveland Consortium for Science Technology Engineering & Mathematics) and high school and college students statewide.

The fun-filled day—free and open to the public—included student project presentations, workshops by local innovators, and national plenary speakers.

**Jacqueline Gillon**, NLI's director of community organization, and **Mark McClain** (Class 21), NLI's director of health and envi-

ronmental initiatives, mentored 10 STEM School students in the preparation of environmental presentations.

Gillon and McClain co-hosted a workshop on environmental justice, and McClain also presented in a workshop on community gardens as a way of building and strengthening community.

For more information, visit the Bioneers Cleveland Web site (see sidebar on page 2).

## **NLI and EHW Team Awarded EPA's Much Sought CARE Grant**

by Mark McClain (Class 21)

NLI, Environmental Health Watch (EHW) and partnering agencies have been awarded a Phase One \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to provide environmental justice education to four Cleveland communities.

The grant will allow the NLI team to assist the Mt. Pleasant, Buckeye-Woodland, Fairfax and Central communities to offer creative solutions to environmental problems that touch their lives.

The NLI team's grant proposal was ranked by the federal agency as the best in the five-state Region 5 area, and third in the nation.

**Mark McClain** (Class 21) of NLI and **Kim Foreman** (Class 17) of Environmental Health Watch were recently invited to New York City to begin preparation for the implementation of the grant.

Through the USEPA CARE Grant Program, NLI will collaborate with Environmental Health Watch, Earth Day Coalition, Cleveland Clean Air Century Fund, Neighborhood Leadership Cleveland graduates, and other community stakeholders to educate community members about environmental justice issues and to implement solutions.

Organization of the effort has already begun, with the actual education process beginning in spring 2010. Call Mark McClain at NLI if you are interested in participating.

## What's Inside:

- NLI Organizes Community Garden
- Environmental Call to Action
- Bioneers Cleveland/CARE Grant

SUPPORT FOR NLI HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY:

ALCOA FOUNDATION  
 CITY OF CLEVELAND DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
 CITY OF CLEVELAND DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION  
 CLEVELAND CITY COUNCIL  
 CUYAHOGA COUNTY FAMILY AND CHILDREN FIRST COUNCIL  
 EVA L. & JOSEPH M. BRUENING FOUNDATION  
 MT. PLEASANT COMMUNITY ZONE, INC.  
 NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS  
 PPG INDUSTRIES  
 PARKER HANNIFIN FOUNDATION  
 SAINT LUKE'S FOUNDATION  
 SISTERS OF CHARITY FOUNDATION  
 STARTING POINT  
 THE ABINGTON FOUNDATION  
 THE CLEVELAND FOUNDATION  
 THE JONATHAN AND MEG RATNER FAMILY FOUNDATION  
 THE RAYMOND JOHN WEAN FOUNDATION  
 THOMAS H. WHITE FOUNDATION, A KEYBANK TRUST  
 UNITED BLACK FUND OF GREATER CLEVELAND  
 UNITED WAY SERVICES OF GREATER CLEVELAND

## NLI Notes

- ◆ **Schools as Neighborhood Resources (SNR)** began a new program year in October. SNR opens several Cleveland public schools after school and in the evening for free educational and recreational activities. For a list of schools, hours and activities, visit the NLI Web site. For more information, contact Michael Matthews at NLI.
- ◆ NLI is now accepting applications for Class 26 of **Neighborhood Leadership Cleveland**, which begins on January 28, 2010. To download an application, visit the NLI Web site. For information, contact Jacqueline Gillon at NLI.
- ◆ New sessions of three of NLI's leadership programs began in September: the **Parents As Leaders Training Academy**, the **Ward 1 Leadership Academy**, and the **Youth Development and Leadership Training** program.
- ◆ The **NLI Holiday Gathering** will be held on Saturday, December 12, from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. at the Fraternal Order of Police Hall at 2249 Payne Avenue in Cleveland. Admission is free for graduates. Call NLI at (216) 812-8700, ext. 17, to RSVP.

**NLI** Neighborhood Leadership Institute  
 1761 East 30th Street, Suite 200  
 Cleveland, OH 44114

Phone: (216) 812-8700  
 Fax: (216) 812-8709  
 Email: [info@neighborhoodleadership.org](mailto:info@neighborhoodleadership.org)  
 Web: [www.neighborhoodleadership.org](http://www.neighborhoodleadership.org)

NONPROFIT ORG.  
 US POSTAGE  
 PAID  
 CLEVELAND, OH  
 PERMIT NO.  
 1500