

PPIA Day of Service

Community Harvest's Urban Oasis Community Farm and Learning Center

Saturday, November 13, 2004, 10am - 1pm



Urban Oasis

PPIA Day of Service Team getting ready to start the day of hard work and good clean fun!

(From left to right, Addie Rasavong, Maria Gaona, Aisha Saaka, Jackie Nolley, Yusef Freeman, Chris Matias)

On a bright and sunny Saturday morning, ten PPIA Fellows, alumni, staff and friends crossed over the Anacostia River to volunteer at Urban Oasis Community Farm and Learning Center. Although meteorologists predicted rain all weekend, we were blessed with good weather to work on the farm. The group arrived at the garden at 10 am where we met other volunteers from Georgetown University and Greater DC Cares. Our team members included:

Yusef Freeman	Washington '99
Jackie Nolley	Michigan '02
Aisha Saaka	Michigan '02
Maria Gaona	Berkeley '03
Sakhoy Lay	Princeton '03
David Green	Baltimore Sun
Eric Harrington	Mobile Satellite Ventures
Chris Matias	PPIA Staff
Rose Previte	PPIA Staff
Addie Rasavong	PPIA Staff

Danielle Rolli, the Farm Manager, explained to us that the Urban Oasis, located at the edge of the Anacostia and Congress Heights neighborhoods, opened in 1998 to address the lack of access to healthy food within these areas. Although Ward 8 has more than 70,000 residents, it does not have a single supermarket. Residents shop for food at corner markets or bodegas, which do not provide fresh fruits or vegetables – only wilted produce. In order to maintain a healthy and balanced diet, residents must go outside of their neighborhood.

Urban Oasis provides an alternative to this unfortunate situation. Through its efforts to grow fresh fruits and vegetables, residents of Ward 8 can now purchase these items at The Heritage Park Farm Stand located in Northeast DC. Maintaining the garden to provide fresh goods to a large community is no easy task - Urban Oasis cannot accomplish this alone. It requires the assistance of volunteers – lots of volunteers. That’s where the PPIA team comes in.



The PPIA team diligently shoveling mulch
(From left to right: Yusef Freeman, Aisha Saaka,
Maria Gaona)



Yusef working a double shift.

To supply healthy food to the community, the garden has to be maintained over the winter. After Ms. Rolli discussed what needed to be done, we separated into three teams. The PPIA Team decided to work on covering up the ground with mulch to prevent weeds from being exposed to the sun. This, in turn, would prevent the weeds from dominating the garden. Moreover, without the weeds squirrels and other animals cannot hide in the garden and eat or destroy the produce.

To help maintain the garden, our project included the following tasks:

- Clearing the garden of weeds and other unwanted growths with chisels
- Covering the ground with a thick layer of cardboard and hay
- Shoveling mulch and transporting it with a wheel barrel to the other side of the garden
- Spreading the mulch over the cardboard

Although our project required a lot of hard physical labor, everyone came ready to work as a team and to share responsibilities. While performing our assigned tasks diligently, we also took the time to get acquainted and reacquainted with each other. Not only did the volunteering opportunity allow us to become better friends and colleagues, it also gave us the chance to give back to the community and help those less fortunate.

PPIA would like to thank Maria Gaona for arranging the volunteer opportunity for us and also thank the volunteers who woke up early on a Saturday morning to give back to the community!

Please look out for future public service opportunities on our website.

For more information on the Community Harvest’s projects, please visit this website:

<http://www.communityharvestdc.org/urban/urban.htm>