

Bethel AME...(continued)

food because of the high cost of food and the lack of transportation to distant markets. She described how, oftentimes, when people start receiving a great resource, like the produce provided by Kula, there is fear in the back of their minds that it will suddenly go away. However, Pat expressed her confidence in Kula and IFN's abilities, stating, "With everything Kula Farm and Interfaith Neighbors is doing now, and how they're preparing for the future by enlarging their footprint and impact on the community, you can tell they're in it for the long haul."

**Donor Spotlight:
Fiskars' Project Orange Thumb**

Project Orange Thumb is an initiative to support innovative organizations addressing education, food security, and biodiversity led by the gardening tools company, Fiskars. Since 2002, they have granted over \$1.8 million to over 390 schools and community groups as part of this project. Our Kula Urban Farm is lucky enough to be one of these recipients!

In collaboration with social media influencer Nick Cutsumpas, otherwise known as "Farmer Nick," Fiskars selects community gardens across the nation that address food insecurity in their communities, providing support with funding and supplies. Nick is a plant coach, urban gardener, and landscape designer who strives to help people create green spaces in pursuit of environmental action and social justice. Kula Urban Farm was chosen



Coral Graszer, Fiskars, Matthias van Oosterhout, Kula Urban Farm, Nick Cutsumpas, "Farmer Nick"

to receive a \$15k grant, gardening tools and supplies through Project Orange Thumb this past May.

Farmer Nick and local Fiskars employees came to the Farm for a tour and to volunteer with our farm staff. After touring Kula's hydroponic greenhouse, the team assisted in preparing the Farm Without Borders for spring planting. The Farm Without Borders is Kula Farm's open community garden that welcomes community members to plant and harvest food free of charge. This Kula Farm initiative embodies just what Project Orange Thumb is looking for in organizations to support: food justice and education in growing food.



Volunteers from Fiskars' New Jersey offices and Nick Cutsumpas, "Farmer Nick" at the Kula Farm Without Borders.

The Project Orange Thumb grant is meant to assist the Farm in continuing to expand its ability to feed more local people. In addition to free food distributed through the Farm Without Borders, Kula Farm distributes free produce to the Bethel AME Food Pantry weekly. Supplying this local, fresh produce provides an essential part of a healthy diet that many local families lack access to normally. Receiving this grant will help the Farm continue and expand on initiatives like this. Luckily, Fiskars and Farmer Nick are doing the work to support organizations that believe fresh, healthy food should be accessible to everyone regardless of race, background and socioeconomic status. Funding and garden supplies from Fiskars will help Kula Farm continue to feed those in need and educate the community in growing food, gardening, cooking and more!

Early Childhood Learning Center

Please join all of us here at Interfaith Neighbors in welcoming the newest members of our team and our youngest neighbors as we celebrate the grand opening of the Interfaith Neighbors Early Child Learning Center!



L-R: Linda Eno, Kaitlyn Estrada, Melissa Mangels (back), Nadine Davenport, Tonya Capriglione, Sharon Jean & Ashley Fabien

Opening this month, Interfaith Neighbors' newest programmatic offering will put our youngest neighbors on track for their educational careers. The Early Child Learning Center is continuing to accept applications for enrollment for early 2024 as the school grows in capacity. Tuition is on a sliding scale, based on ability to pay. Visit our website for more information.

Want to get involved at Interfaith Neighbors?

There are lots of ways you can help!

GIVE • LEARN • VOLUNTEER

To learn more about the community issues we address or for more information about volunteering, joining our team, or ways to give, visit: www.interfaithneighbors.org or call 732.775.0525.



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Interfaith Neighbors

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

September 2023

**Program Spotlight:
Community Empowerment:
Education & Food Justice**

Kula Urban Farm, a program of Interfaith Neighbors, has been empowering the Asbury Park community since its inception in 2015. With its hydroponic greenhouse, traditional raised beds, and Farm Without Borders, Kula Farm grows seasonal, sustainable produce that can be purchased by local restaurants and residents, while supplying free produce to the community and neighboring food pantry. However, the work to support the community with access to healthy food does not stop there. The Farm is also committed to providing education, experiences for the development of a healthy lifestyle, and an engaging community space for community members.

Kula's dedication to food justice and access is exemplified



The Kula Farm Without Borders at Springwood & Atkins Avenues.

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Community Empowerment... (continued)

through its partnership with Bethel AME Food Pantry. Produce is harvested and contributed weekly to this local food pantry, located on the lot adjacent to the Farm, and distributed to local families. Many West Side residents lack the funds and access to fresh, healthy produce and would suffer nutritionally without this initiative. Kula Farm also manages the Farm Without Borders located on Springwood and Atkins Avenues. The Farm Without Borders has transformed a vacant lot into an open community garden, where community members are welcome to harvest throughout the season. This not only makes for a more beautiful Asbury Park, but it also allows the community to be involved in the process of growing their own healthy food.

Kula Farm also facilitates a job program, designed to promote foundational workplace skills for members of the community. By offering a positive work experience to add to a resume, Kula Farm hopes to take away barriers to future employment. Working with your hands, performing tasks like planting and weeding, can also be extremely therapeutic. Those returning to the workforce after a long hiatus or previous incarceration are welcome to restart their journey here--- stop by to fill out an application!



Sisters Academy students visit the Kula Farm without Borders and assist with the harvest.

Community engagement and education is facilitated through classes and workshops held at the Farm.

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Community Empowerment... (continued)


Classes and workshops engage individuals of all ages on a variety of topics. Kula works with various schools to organize extracurricular programs and holds homeschool classes for children, teaching them about the environment and gardening, while providing hands-on activities. Some of the workshop topics for adults include composting, the cannabis industry, recycled art, kimchi making, nature printmaking, and more! It's an amazing space to learn and express yourself while engaging with the community.

Interfaith Neighbors' Meeting the Moment Campaign has secured funding for an exciting expansion of the Farm, that will add a three-season pavilion, a full kitchen, and bathrooms. Look for these new additions next spring! The expansion will allow the Farm to increase community outreach and events to reach even more people in the community. Kula Urban Farm will continue to provide the surrounding community with the tools, education, and space that empowers them to conquer food injustices and to flourish.

Neighbors Spotlight: Bethel AME Church & Pat Cooper

After moving away from her hometown of Neptune to work in other New Jersey cities, such as Camden and Newark, Pat Cooper came back to her community to serve those in need through Bethel AME Church in Asbury Park. Before returning "back home," Pat gained a wide variety of experience. She was employed at the Department of Labor for over 25 years, then worked for the Employment and Training Commission, and finally, proceeded to open her own business focused on management and consulting.

She began working with Bethel AME Church in 1999 when she returned to the Neptune/Asbury Park area. She served as Chair of the Bethel AME Board from 1999 to around 2013. She now serves as the Director of the Bethel AME Food Pantry. When she first started

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Bethel AME... (continued)



Pat Cooper with seedlings at Kula Urban Farm.

Bethel AME's local recipients.

"The relationship with Kula Farm began when they approached us about using part of our property to grow food and proposed some of the yields be donated to our pantry in return," Pat recounted. "We were not receiving produce from any major food bank at the time, and I thought this could be a great addition to our supply."

Bethel AME Food Pantry not only began to receive produce from Kula Farm, but they also started to get their youth involved in Kula Farm programs. These provide education and hands-on experience in nutrition, wellness, and farming.

"It's so important to have access to this fresh, healthy produce to create a well-rounded diet for individuals picking up food from our pantry. I love the fact that it's also teaching our young people about nutrition, and how they should be treating their bodies" Cooper explained when asked about why this relationship is so

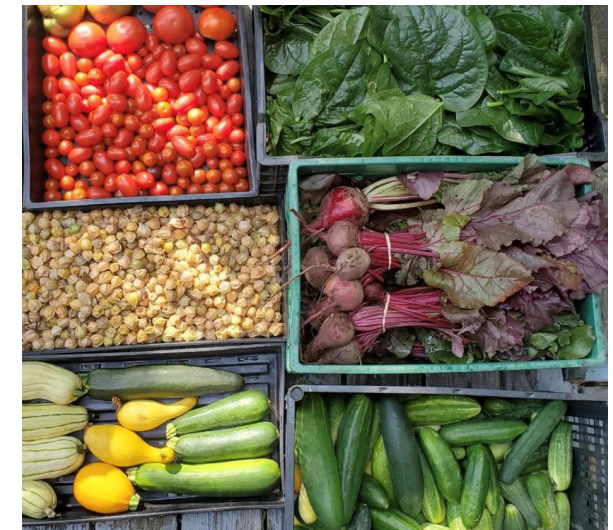
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Bethel AME...(continued)

valuable. "I'm a firm believer that organizations working together makes for the best service to the community. We are so grateful to be able to have this relationship with Kula Farm," Cooper continued.

"The community we serve is primarily Haitian, and Kula has adapted to their wants and needs by growing produce they request. Our clients seem to love the red spinach, radishes, and dry beans. Many of them have also started eating produce that is new to them and learned how to prepare it, ultimately making their diet more nutritious and well-rounded," Pat explained. "The community absolutely loves the fresh produce from Kula, and many of them would not have access to it without this relationship."

Pat went on to describe the impact our programs make in the community, stating, "We are so grateful for Kula Farm and Interfaith Neighbors for taking an active role in the community and making sure members have access to things that are critical to health, like food and housing."



Sampling of produce harvested and donated to the Bethel AME Food Pantry

Pat expressed again how important it is for these community members to have access to this fresh healthy

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