

Cleveland's newest greenhouse will produce greens for dinner and green for workers

Central-area greenhouse to revitalize old area

Posted: 05/18/2012



• By: Leon Bibb, newsnet5.com

Advertisement

CLEVELAND - Like a giant erector set, a framework is growing out of what had been an abandoned field of weeds at the corner of Kinsman Road and Grand Avenue. Drivers motoring through the area have watched a 10-acre field leveled by construction crews and watched workers erect a maze of metal framework easily the size of several football fields.

What is growing out of the soil on the plot in the Central neighborhood is a greenhouse that will eventually be owned by the men and women who will work in it, producing 3 million heads of lettuce and 300,000 pounds of herbs every year.

Welcome to urban farming in the heart of Cleveland. The operation, within sight of the big intersection of Woodland-Kinsman-East 55th Street, is run by Green City Growers, a company that reworks lands in urban areas that have fallen fallow because of industries and residents that have moved away, leaving only the weeds to grow.

"It is important to produce locally-grown food and to transform a neighborhood by providing jobs and providing employment where profits are share with worker-owners is a good thing," said Mary Donnell, chief executive officer of Green City Growers. She talked about the idea of urban farming as she walked among the acres under construction.

Eventually, an estimated 42 employees will work the farm and become worker-owners, having an investment in their own operation. Donnell said many workers will be drawn from the Central area, where the farm is located. Much of the money behind this project came from the Cleveland Foundation.

All around, construction workers were putting up the grid that will hold light-weight plastic that will allow sunlight to pass through for the lettuce that will be grown hydroponically. All the lettuce, herbs and other leafy greens will be in nutrient-rich water. The greenhouse will be able to grow products year-around.

"This is a very large investment in the community," said Kevin Cicen, project manager of the firm building the greenhouse, Albert M. Higley Co. "It's certainly a different kind of project."

Passersby echo that same sentiment. Many asked about the project, wondering what was going up on the site of an elementary school that was torn down decades ago. Next to it was a sweater mill. It has been closed for about 40 years. The construction site draws the gazes of thousands of motorists who make the turn off East 55th Street or Kinsman Road as they are traveling to and from Interstate 77, about a quarter of a mile from the greenhouse project.

Although the goal of the project is to grow lettuce for grocery stores, institutions and wholesale operations, another large factor is the neighborhood itself. Cleveland and scores of other cities are plagued by large tracts of land that used to be locations of industries and homes. As the industries moved out and the residents moved away, large tracts of land became eyesores with the weeds blowing in the wind.

Green City Growers said they believe through its project in the Central area, it can be a catalyst to bring the neighborhood to a higher level. When the construction project is complete in November, what will be growing here will be more than lettuce. What will be growing on the land will be employment opportunities and hope.

##

Copyright 2012 Scripps Media, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

-  PRINT

Share This Comments

Login or signup

You must be logged in to comment

Post

Live

No items at this time...

social networking by