

Bon Secours St. Francis Health System

Education, Community Garden showcase healthy food success

Bon Secours St. Francis, a Greenville, SC-based two-hospital health system, has successfully integrated healthy food initiatives into a system-wide sustainability program launched in 2009.

Bon Secours St. Francis Health System includes hospitals in downtown and the east side of Greenville.

Achievements overview

- Bought more locally grown produce, including organic, and is exploring oil-less fryers
- Established Community Garden, a series of 16 raised individual plots for churches, non-profits and community residents to grow their own produce
- Established internships in environmental studies through Furman University
- “Hands-on” education programs for composting, recycling and community gardening basics with housing development for low-income seniors.

While Bon Secours St. Francis Health System has notched notable “green” successes across all areas of its operations, Karen Schwartz, FACHE, vice president, support services for Bon Secours St. Francis, is particularly proud of accomplishments in the area of healthy food. Schwartz leads the greening efforts for the system.

Community Garden empowers residents

The Green Team quickly found creative ways of not only bringing healthier fresh food into the hospital cafeterias through such measures as buying more locally grown, organic produce and oil-less fryers, but also supporting the communities surrounding each hospital. The result: a community garden that allows Greenville residents to use individual plots and get assistance in growing their own produce. And recycling discarded food and trim waste in the garden’s “worm farm” (more than 600 pounds in 2010) produces a special concoction called “worm tea,” which is sold for \$3 a bottle to staff and community residents and makes the garden operations self-sustaining.



Volunteers from Bon Secours St. Francis and the community work on building the 16 plots in the Community Garden.

The Community Gardens, developed with the help of local master gardeners, the Girl Scouts, and donations from local businesses, came about after the Green Team took on a project as members of “Leadership Greenville,” a Chamber of Commerce initiative.

“Our downtown campus is geographically situated adjacent to two underserved communities close to us,” said Schwartz. “And they were food deserts before our garden was established. It’s wonderful because we are really helping those people realize how they can change their environment and be healthier and understand what that all means because they take ownership of their garden plots.” A Greenville citizens’ group donated fruit and shade trees to the property in November 2010.

Most importantly, the Community Garden project provided concrete evidence of Bon Secours’ overall mission and ministry to help people. “It’s about our mission for community outreach and it’s us taking this initiative outside the walls of the hospital,” she added. “We wanted to be who we are and not just the flavor of the week.”

Promoting healthy food lifestyles

Foodservice departments in both hospitals also offer employee tours of the cafeteria, where dietitians show them how to select or plan healthy meals. Foodservice also offers attractively priced healthy menu options, and employees are provided with health risk assessments (HRA) and biometric testing that helps them track their progress with healthy eating habits.

Educating citizens through internships

Bon Secours St. Francis also has partnered with Furman University to establish internships in environmental studies. Internship projects including a re-design of the St. Francis Community Garden’s handicapped-accessible beds, purchase of a compost tumbler and assisting the local “Seniors on the Go” program in designing a special “senior-friendly” garden. St. Francis Health System also works with Mercy Housing-Southeast to share “hands-on” education for composting, recycling and community gardening basics with the residents of Mulberry Court, a housing development for low-income seniors.



A community resident shows off her bountiful harvest from her plot in Bon Secours St. Francis Community Garden

Hosting community education fairs

St. Francis also hosts a week long Earth Week event on campus. During Earth Week, staff can eat eco-friendly, no-waste lunches and visit vendor booths to learn about things like buying and growing organic food.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Schwartz points out that ensuring reliable data is a key factor of green business partnerships. And “great intentions” must be shepherded into real, sustainable long term programs.

Corporately, Bon Secours attributes it success to:

- Incorporating ecology into its mission and ministry;
- Connecting with and inspiring staff;
- An organization structure with clearly delineated accountability;
- Specific measures and targets;
- Making “green” activities a core part of current work, not a new and additional project; and
- Association with peers such as Practice GreenHealth and effective green business partners.



Visitors attend one of the many booths at the annual Earth Week Fair on the downtown campus

Video showcases achievements

St. Francis uses every opportunity to reinforce its ‘green’ message, including using its employee intranet to explain ongoing initiatives. St. Francis’ staff also recently produced a [special video](#) and posted on its YouTube channel. The video, entitled “[Every Day is Earth Day](#),” showcases a number of greening initiatives at the Greenville system, including healthy food.



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Scenes from the special YouTube video (at bottom: CEO Mark Nantz)