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## Drive-Thru CHICAGO BITE BY BITE

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FEATURE FRI JUN 04 2010

### Farmville in Real Life



At [Green Youth Farm](#), a crop of Illinois high school students spend their summer afield.

Turn off Green Bay Road and enter the Greenbelt Forest Preserve, and the first thing you'll likely notice is all the green. The Preserve is a haven amid urban environs, featuring prairie, wetlands, and woodlands dominated by oak. Follow the road around a few bends, and you'll come to an organic farm--the North Chicago site of Green Youth Farm (GYF), a youth leadership program of the Chicago Botanic Garden. Located in the heart of Greenbelt and spanning an acre, it's a haven inside a haven.

If you're like me, you're the sort of city dweller who refers to almost any kind of abundant nature in/around Chicagoland as a refuge or a rarity. The farm is both. What it isn't, though, is rural (despite a certain city-dweller tendency to describe it that way). Heidi Joynt, Coordinator of the North Chicago farm, is familiar with this tendency. "Sometimes students from North Lawndale or Washington Park [the two other GYF sites, both within city limits] will get up to North Chicago and be like, 'Dude, we're out in the sticks!'" she says. "But it's not really that rural; we're just in a forest preserve! There are trees around, and it's really quiet."

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FEATURE FRI JUN 04 2010

### Farmville in Real Life

BY LAURA PEARSON

At Green Youth Farm, a crop of Illinois high school students spend their summer afield. Turn off Green Bay Road and enter the Greenbelt Forest Preserve, and the first thing you'll likely notice is all the green. The Preserve is...

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Whether framed by trees, the 'L,' or Chicago streets, the mission of all three GYF locations is to educate high school students about organic farming in order to grow leadership skills, relationships, and civic pride. The student crew members are selected via an application process and receive a stipend for working approximately 20 hours per week from mid-May through mid-October. Modeled after **The Food Project**--a community initiative to affect social change through sustainable agriculture in eastern Massachusetts--GYF offers a multifaceted curriculum emphasizing hands-on learning. In addition to maintaining the farm, students participate in team-building exercises and art workshops, create business and marketing plans, and take field trips to places like Green City Market and Pembroke Farms.



The seeds of the farm were sown in spring of 2003 when the Chicago Botanic Garden, in partnership with the Lake County Forest Preserve District and Growing Power, Inc., established the North Chicago Farm. The focus was to reach out to students in the underserved communities of North Chicago and Waukegan. Now the North Chicago site employs approximately 20-25 students per season who come to the farm to learn green practices and hone green thumbs. This year, almost 100 high schoolers applied to work at this location, and around 60 were interviewed. The youth work in crews of about six people, each led by a student crew leader who helps communicate and coordinate the tasks for each day. Joynt says that the staff (the Coordinator, the Grower, and one or two college-age interns) then steps back to allow students to take charge. "Our goal is to act as support staff and try to give the crew as much responsibility and ownership over the tasks as possible," she says.

Waukegan High School student Julio Guzman, a crew leader this season at the North Chicago Farm, embraces the challenges of his leadership role: "To be a leader, you have to be open-minded to other ideas and understand that there's no set way of doing a specific task," he says. "So although you may have something in your head--like 'We're going to weed in this way,'--you've got to understand that other people might have a better idea for how to get the weeding done faster."

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Fri Jun 4 2010

**Beer Hoptacular @ Aragon**

Fri Jun 4 2010

**Sense Objects @ Noble and Superior Projects**

Fri Jun 4 2010

**The Interview Show @ Hideout**

Fri Jun 4 2010

**Free Lunch Drinks @ Longman & Eagle**

Sat Jun 5 2010

**History of Pastry with Gale Gand @ Kendall College**

Sat Jun 5 2010

**Beer Hoptacular @ Aragon**

Sat Jun 5 2010

**World Kitchen Learning Series: Dine Like an Egyptian**

Sat Jun 5 2010

**Fork and the Road Blue Plate Special Tour**

Sat Jun 5 2010

**Spring Trunk Show @ Galleria 1712**

Sun Jun 6 2010

**Oistrach Symphony Orchestra Summer Quartet**



According to the crew leaders, a difficult part of the job is erratic weather. "It's the most challenging aspect," says Katherine Williams, a Waukegan grad who's attending College of Lake County. "You don't know when it's going to rain, when it's going to be cold, or when it's going to be blazing hot."

Rain or shine, however, a highlight of the week is community lunch day, in which crew members use their sustainably grown produce—plus a few supplemental ingredients—to prepare a meal for 50 people in the Botanic Garden Kitchen. Crews from the North

Lawndale and Washington Park GYFs come up to share in the meals, too. The North Chicago students recall trying out a particularly popular recipe last year: strawberry shortcake featuring fresh strawberries from the farm.

By cooking with the produce they've grown, GYF members are inspired to try new tastes and experiment culinarily. "A lot of people don't know what to do with turnips or beets, or a delicious thing to do with radishes," Joynt says. "We're trying to get students familiar. They don't have to like everything, but we really encourage being open to new experiences." Students also get a taste of nutritional education, such as learning the difference between processed foods and fresh, whole foods.

"We're huge advocates of eating food that's food, and we try to shed light on why it's important that we're eating the real thing," Joynt says.

Since it took root in North Chicago in 2003—and subsequently expanded to two other sites—the GYF program has enriched the lives of hundreds of Illinois youth and their communities. In autumn of 2008, the North Lawndale GYF received first place in Mayor Daley's Landscape Awards, a program recognizing environmental beautification efforts. In spring of 2009, the Washington Park Farm at Dyett High School was established, and in the process of expanding, it plans to offer community growing space for area residents, to be managed by GYF students.

Not all the growth in the GYF program is in the form of herbs, flowers, and fresh produce. In honing their farming skills, some students cultivate new career goals and decide to pursue studies in horticulture, agriculture, or environmental science. Julio Guzman is one such student: He intends to major in Environmental Studies as an undergraduate.

Sun Jun 6 2010

[Daniel Biss Fundraiser @ Hot Doug's](#)

Tue Jun 8 2010

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Wed Jun 9 2010

[Taste of Chicago Preview](#)

Thu Jun 10 2010

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*Drive-Thru* is the food and drink section of [Gapers Block](#), covering the city's vibrant dining, drinking and cooking scene. [More...](#)

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In autumn, when the farming season winds down and the forest preserve is drained of its greenness, the students at Green Youth Farm will pause and reflect on their accomplishments.



"You look back at the end of the year and see all that you've done, all that you've grown, and think, 'Wow. We really came together. Most of us started out not knowing each other and now we're this huge family,'" Guzman says.

Echoes crew leader Jesus Cuezzi: "You grow a bond with a lot of people here."

~ \* ~

Green Youth Farm students sell sustainably grown produce at the [Chicago Botanic Garden Farmers' Market](#). Two of the three sites also host onsite farm stands.

The [North Chicago Green Youth Farm](#) hosts onsite U-Picks/farm stands on Wednesday and Saturday, July 14 - Oct. 9, from 9am-1pm.

The [North Lawndale Green Youth Farm](#) hosts a farmers' market onsite every Wednesday, July 7 - Oct. 13, from 3-7pm.

The [Washington Park/Dyett Green Youth Farm](#) participates in the Bronzeville Farmers' Market at 4400 S. Cottage Grove Ave. every Saturday, beginning July 10, from 9am-1pm.

Green Youth Farm hosts [open houses](#). The next one is July 28 in North Lawndale.

*This feature is supported in part by a Community News Matters grant from The Chicago Community Trust and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. More information [here](#).*

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