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HEALTHY FOOD FOR A HEALTHY BALTIMORE!

FRANCISCAN CENTER LAUNCHES CUTTING-EDGE COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA) PROJECT.

Baltimore, Maryland – May 3, 2013

On Monday May 6, 2013, the **Franciscan Center** will launch its ***Fresh Harvest CSA Project*** at a kick-off event to be held at 11:00 a.m. at 101 W. 23rd Street, Baltimore Maryland, 21218. **Mark Furst, CEO of United Way of Central Maryland**, and **Molly Shattuck, Founder of Molly Shattuck Vibrant Living**, will be on hand to speak about this exciting project.

The ***Fresh Harvest CSA Project*** is designed to introduce fresh, healthy foods to families and individuals in need in our community, with the goal of helping them to incorporate these foods into their daily diet. The **Franciscan Center** is partnering with United Way of Central Maryland, Molly Shattuck Vibrant Living, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future and the University of Maryland Extension (FSNE) to implement this innovative project. Our kick-off event takes place during the United Way of Central Maryland *Families Living United Healthy Foods Week*.

The ***Fresh Harvest Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Project*** is funded by United Way of Central Maryland's Access to Healthy Food Initiative, a multi-faceted program that is making healthy food more easily accessible for food insecure central Marylanders through collaborations to grow more locally, improve distribution and increase access, affordability and education.

From June through November, 2013, the Franciscan Center will provide families and individuals identified to participate in the ***Fresh Harvest CSA Project*** with a free weekly share of seasonal fresh produce from One Straw Farm, the largest Food Alliance Certified Vegetable Farm in Maryland, in return for information about their use of fresh produce and their eating habits.

In addition to free fresh vegetables, the **Franciscan Center** will provide participants with basic cooking utensils and seasonings as well as weekly food preparation tips and recipes. Volunteers will assist with preparing fresh vegetables each week and guest chefs will demonstrate how to prepare delicious dishes using the vegetables provided. We will also provide information about the benefits of exercise and other

tips to encourage a healthier lifestyle.

Each week throughout the growing season, the **Franciscan Center** will conduct interviews with families and individuals participating in the *Fresh Harvest CSA Project*, to learn about their use of this fresh produce and assess its impact in their lives. Data collected in these interviews will be compiled in a report at the end of the project. Participants will also enjoy a family field trip to One Straw Farm during the growing season to meet the farmers, learn about how their food is grown and have lunch in the country.

The *Fresh Harvest CSA Project* is the first of its kind in Baltimore – a unique opportunity to gain information about the food preferences of economically vulnerable men, women and children in our community and determine how to reach them with information about the benefits of fresh, healthy foods. With more than 300,000 people in Central Maryland living without access to safe and nutritious foods, this information will be an invaluable resource.

The *Fresh Harvest CSA Project* is the latest in a series of healthy foods initiatives to be introduced by the **Franciscan Center** on behalf of poor and hungry citizens of Baltimore. The Center is committed to improving public health in the Baltimore community by offering access to fresh, healthy foods through our soup kitchen and emergency food pantry programs. Reaching out to those we serve to learn what types of fresh vegetables they like and can use will help us to tailor our programs to meet their specific needs.

The **Franciscan Center** serves hot, nutritious meals to as many as 600 men, women and children daily, five days a week throughout the year. In partnership with the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, the Franciscan Center is the *only* soup kitchen in the country currently participating in the “Meatless Mondays” program, offering a wholesome, delicious vegetarian meal to our clients each Monday.

The **Franciscan Center’s** emergency food pantry provided more than 7,000 bags of groceries to needy families and individuals throughout 2012. For the past year, we have offered our clients receiving this service the choice between our standard bag of groceries and a “Healthy Option” bag that includes the same amount of food - but lower fat, lower sodium foods, whole grain products, frozen ground turkey and fresh or frozen vegetables. More than 40% of our clients are now choosing the “Healthy Option” groceries.

In addition to our food programs, the **Franciscan Center** offers a broad range of emergency assistance and supportive services designed to help our clients become self-sufficient, including financial assistance with energy bills, eviction prevention, medical prescriptions and transportation as well as help securing birth certificates and Maryland State identification cards, which is one of the greatest barriers keeping people homeless. In addition, our Technical Resource Center helps our clients gain basic computer skills, build resumes and apply for jobs and benefits.

Founded in 1968 as a ministry of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, the **Franciscan Center** was one of the first human services organizations in Baltimore. What began with the Sisters handing out sandwiches at the back door of the orphanage they operated in the Charles Village neighborhood has grown to serve every Baltimore zip code, offering a range of services that is unique in the City. In fact, the **Franciscan Center** is the #1 referred agency on the United Way’s 211 emergency hotline.

A fact sheet is attached with information about the **Franciscan Center’s** programs. For more information about the *Fresh Harvest CSA Project* or other **Franciscan Center** programs, contact Meg Ducey by e-mail at: mducey@fcbmore.org, or by phone at: 410-467-5340 ext. 117 (office); 410-852-4540 (cell).