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HEALTHY FOOD FOR A HEALTHY BALTIMORE

***FRANCISCAN CENTER'S FRESH HARVEST CSA PROJECT
WRAPS UP ITS SECOND YEAR WITH A HEALTHY THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION.***

Baltimore, Maryland – November 18, 2014

Thursday, November 20, 2014 marks the 25th and final week that 29 area families and individuals will receive a *free* Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share through the Franciscan Center's ***Fresh Harvest CSA Project***. We're celebrating with a healthy Thanksgiving celebration for men and women who completed the project successfully, to be held at **2:00 p.m. on November 20th at the Franciscan Center, located at 101 W. 23rd Street in Baltimore**. As a way to say "thank you," the Franciscan Center will distribute Thanksgiving baskets containing essential ingredients and utensils to cook a well-balanced and healthy Thanksgiving meal.

Now in its second year, this innovative program is a collaboration between the **Franciscan Center, United Way of Central Maryland (our funder), the Johns Hopkins University Center for a Livable Future, University of Maryland Extension Food Supplement Nutrition Education Program (FSNE) and One Straw Farm** in Whitehall, Maryland. It was designed to help improve public health in Baltimore long term by introducing fresh, healthy food to families and individuals living in areas of the City classified as "food deserts," with limited access to fresh vegetables.

The ***Franciscan Center's Fresh Harvest CSA Project*** identified as many as 30 families and individuals to receive a free weekly share of fresh produce from One Straw Farm in return for information about their food preferences and lifestyles. Each participant agreed to complete a comprehensive survey at the beginning and end of the project that focused on their current eating habits, their definition of healthy foods and their lifestyle. Every Thursday afternoon when picking up their CSA share, they were also given a brief survey about the types of produce they received the prior week.

In addition to fresh vegetables, the Franciscan Center provided participants with basic cooking utensils and seasonings as well as weekly food preparation tips and recipes. Each week, participants also had access to informational sessions covering a range of health-related topics that included diabetes, processed foods, budget shopping, meditation, yoga, and sugar intake.

This year, 27 out of 30 people successfully completed the project (a large jump from last year's 12). Part of this increase is due to the quality of participants – comprised of people who either completed the full CSA program successfully last year or expressed a sincere interest in eating healthy this year.

“On the surface, this program is about giving high quality produce to individuals and families that need it on a regular basis,” said Christian Metzger, Executive Director of the Franciscan Center. “But what it’s really about is seeing if the CSA model could address hunger and potentially be a solution to food deserts in Baltimore.”

By simply asking people about their food preferences, Christian explained, this project could provide valuable information to owners of urban farms or local corner stores about the types of produce that are in demand in under-served neighborhoods. In this year's program, the Franciscan Center aims to provide its participants with meaningful educational opportunities as well as inspiration to taste new and unfamiliar produce.

“I use to give away eggplant,” laughed Paulette Lipscomb, a second-year participant who learned about the project at the end of its first year. Paulette lives in a food desert and says that the closest grocery store is more than a mile from her home. She makes the trip to the Franciscan Center each week because of the access to fresh produce. “It’s a good idea to come because of the vegetables,” she said. “You don’t get enough vegetables in you and this program made me eat more vegetables.”

More information about this project as well as other projects and services at the Franciscan Center can be found at www.fcbmore.org. For questions, please contact Meg Ducey at (410) 467-5340, Ext. 117 or mducey@fcbmore.org.

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