2003 RUDY BRUNER AWARD
PROJECT DATA
PROJECT DATA

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Project Name: Urban Oasis Community Farm
Location: Washington, DC

Owner: Community Harvest

Project Use(s): vegetable production, learning center, public green space
Project Size: 1+ acre

Total Development Cost: $300,000+

Annual Operating Budget (if appropriate): $55,000

Date Initiated: Spring 1998
Percent Completed by December 1, 2002: ~40%

Project Completion Date (if appropriate): ongoing

Attach, if you wish, a list of relevant project dates

Application submitted by:

Name: Nicole Lewis
Title: Farm Coordinator

Organization: Community Harvest

Address: 2437 15th St, NW
City/State/Zip: Washington, DC 20009

Telephone: (202) 667-8875
Fax: (202) 667-9669

E-mail: urban oasis@communityharvestdc.org

Weekend Contact Number (for notification): 202-678-0567

Key Participants (Attach an additional sheet if needed)

Organization: WIC
Key Participant: Carolyn Providence
Telephone/e-mail: carolyn.providence@dc.gov

Architect/Designer: Lee and Associates
Adrienne McCray
amccray@leeandassociates.com

Developer:

Professional Consultant: Wareck Consulting
James Wareck
Wareckconsulting@yahoo.com

Community Group: Advisory Neighborhood Commission
Virginia Major
202-561-2837

Others: CEED youth group
Charles Curry
202-547-8642

Please indicate how you learned of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. (Check all that apply).

- Direct Mailing
- Magazine Advertisement
- Previous RBA entrant
- Professional Newsletter
- Previous Selection Committee member
- Other (please specify)

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Signature: Nicole Lewis
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
ABSTRACT
**ABSTRACT**

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**Project Name**: Urban Oasis Community Farm and Learning Center

**Address**: 2701 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave, SE

Washington, DC 20032

1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major project goals.

Urban Oasis Community Farm is the unifying project in Community Harvest’s efforts to create a locally rooted, sustainable food system that meets the needs of both low-income communities and local farmers. The farm is located in the Anacostia community of Washington, DC’s notoriously underserved Ward 8. It shares the magnificent grounds of St. Elizabeth’s, a nineteenth century hospital campus. It occupies a bluff overlooking our nation’s capital—its monuments, neighborhoods, and rivers. The mini-farm is five years old and one acre in size.

Urban Oasis has two primary functions. The first is to funnel fresh, nutritious, chemical-free food into the food-insecure community surrounding it. We grow more than 20 types of vegetables and herbs, which are sold at low-cost through partnerships with local residents at neighborhood farmers’ and flic markets. The farm’s second role is to educate and inspire community members to adopt this newly-accessible healthy diet. Our Living Learning Laboratories [LLL] program engages local youths in hands-on garden based education addressing nutrition, food security, and ecology from exciting age-appropriate perspectives. Information distributed at our farm stands and volunteer day dialogues engage and enlighten local adults.

Our goal, through these efforts, is to increase the consumption of healthy, fresh foods, and the appreciation for regional farmers by low-income urban consumers, thereby improving human health and strengthening the depressed inner city economy.

2. Why does the project merit the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.)

The integration of environmental and nutrition education at Urban Oasis with the service of more tangible needs—hunger, employment, and diversion in nature, for instance—makes its impact sustainable and relevant. The farm distributes high quality food in areas where there is limited access, financially benefits local residents from the food distribution, and offers an oasis of natural beauty and open space within easy reach of the urban community.

Produce is distributed to low income DC residents, not only as an effort to feed the hungry, but also to provide food of exceptional purity, freshness, and flavor to a population whose grocery options tend to be limited and inferior. Equitable quality, as well as quantity, is at the heart of urban food security concerns.

The community members who sell Urban Oasis’s produce earn income for their households. The farm facilitates their entrepreneurship and rewards their initiative. Youth participants earn community service hours required for high school graduation, build their resumes and job skills, and they may attain part-time employment through Community Harvest.

At Urban Oasis, inner city residents experience nature in ways otherwise unavailable to them. Visitors catch colorful insects, taste edible plants straight from their sun warmed branches, and spot wildlife as surprising as deer, groundhogs, and bald eagles. The opportunity is remarkable considering the austere concrete environment surrounding the grounds.

Urban Oasis Community Farm is uniquely relevant to both the immediate needs and the long-term holistic development of its urban community.
2003 RUDY BRUNER AWARD PROJECT DESCRIPTION
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. How has the project impacted the local community?

Over the past five years, Urban Oasis Community Farm has sold nearly ten thousand pounds of fresh, chemical-free, low-cost produce within food-insecure communities of Washington, DC. Over one thousand pounds of surplus produce has been donated to local soup kitchens and partner organizations.

During the 2002 growing season, produce from Urban Oasis supported the micro-entrepreneurial ventures of three local teams of low-income community members. The farm’s yields brought these partners roughly $2,000 in revenue, and it facilitated the teams’ championship of nutrition and financial independence in their own communities.

This year, approximately 200 students ranging from 5-21 years old acquired new knowledge, life skills and an activist’s ethic through Urban Oasis’s farm-based youth education programs. For many, it was an experience full of firsts—a dragonfly sighting, the taste of fresh rosemary, planting a seed, picking a cucumber, etc. The new awareness of nature in their own community has led many to adopt more conscious consuming and polluting habits. LLL youngsters learned, for example, how to pack a school lunch that produces no disposable waste. Students became intellectually and emotionally empowered to improve their surroundings and to discuss their concerns with their peers and elders.

Most of all, the farm has provided its thousands of visitors with a renewed appreciation for the stigmatized Anacostia community—its beauty and importance.

2. Describe the underlying values of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required to implement the project?

Urban Oasis Community Farm was founded on the belief that all people deserve access to good food, regardless of one’s neighborhood or income level. Ward 8, where Urban Oasis is located, has no supermarkets to serve its 70,000+ residents. While we could market our produce as a gourmet specialty in wealthy areas, we choose to sell in Ward 8 at a price affordable to the farm’s neighbors. We remain financially viable thanks to our dedicated volunteers.

We believe that community ownership of a project is crucial to its sustainability and impact. Our volunteer-based production system falls in line with that value. However, most of our volunteers have no prior gardening experience. Teaching and supervising each task is demanding on Community Harvest’s staff, and inevitably, some damaging mistakes are made. Yet the enthusiasm of the workers overcomes these challenges.

We attempt to enrich every farm visitor’s lifelong learning on food security, ecology, and the local community’s needs and assets. We provide a brief tour of the hospital campus’s highlights—particularly an overlook point viewing the city, and a civil war cemetery where Union and Confederate, black and white soldiers rest together. We host dialogues on various aspects of the food system: industrial and family farms, local and national distribution, synthetic chemical and organic techniques, etc.; We also share resources for healthy shopping and dining in DC. While it would be more “efficient” to just put our volunteers to work, we are dedicated to sharing all of Urban Oasis’s gifts and preparing our neighbors to act responsibly.
3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate.

   Local vendors of Urban Oasis's produce play an important role in the farm's agricultural planning. Throughout the year, they inform the farm manager of the types and quantities of vegetables that they want. Together, the two parties make informal evaluations of market performance, and adjust farm production as needed. (Purple string beans are a favorite.)

   Community Harvest's full time educator visits local schools and youth organizations to invite their enrollment in Living Learning Laboratories programs at Urban Oasis. Participants are asked to evaluate the curriculum at the end of each six week session. Adult volunteers reach us through service organizations, universities, corporate volunteer days, and independently.

   Urban Oasis addresses concerns that were prioritized through community working group meetings (by Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan) and the mayor’s comprehensive plan for the ward. Those priorities include food access, green space, and recreational, educational, and vocational opportunities for children and adults. Lee and Associates landscape architecture team is currently redesigning some physical elements of the farm that will help us to facilitate further community engagement and maximize food production and educational efficacy.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable.

   Urban Oasis Farm’s operating costs for 2003 are approximately $55,000. Primary support comes from foundations. In 2002, the project received the following grants, to be shared with Community Harvest youth development programs.

   Park Foundation $15,000  
   Prince Charitable Trust $15,000  
   Sierra Club $2,500

   The following are outstanding 2002 funding requests:

   Farm Aid $5,000  
   Graham Fund $20,000

   Earned income from produce sold totaled approximately $1,000 (separate from funds earned by local entrepreneurial vendors) in 2002. In kind donations valued approximately $1,000.

   General operating costs such as transportation, office supplies, telephone, etc. are supported by Community Harvest's overhead budget.

5. Is the project unique and/or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings?

   Urban Oasis Community Farm and Learning Center is the only project of its sort in the Washington, DC area. It is one of only a few programs nationwide that combines hands-on experience in food production and nature education for urban residents with personal and professional skill development. It effectively addresses urban issues, including food security, nutrition, adult and youth employment, recreation, education, and environmental justice.

   The program can be adapted to virtually any urban environment. If land is unavailable, it could take the form of a rooftop garden. Even a row house-sized yard can produce an astounding amount of food and attract an impressive diversity of wildlife. The educational curriculum can be adapted to emphasize any community's unique needs and cultural flavors. A committed school, church, or individual could feasibly spark a similar program.

   The success of Urban Oasis reflects its participants’ and staff's passion for social and environmental justice—particularly their faith that ALL people deserve to eat and live well. Wherever this passion lives, there is potential for a thriving urban garden and learning center.
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name: Phyllis Tarver-Kashif
Title: Director of CMS in Bloom
Organization: Clara Muhammad School (CMS)
Address: 2313-15 MLK Jr. Av., SE
City/State/ZIP: Washington, DC 20020
Telephone: (202) 610-1090 (w) (301) 459-2858 (h)
Fax: (202) 610-1092 (w)
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Signature: Phyllis Tarver-Kashif

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

A representative of Urban Oasis came to our school and made a presentation to the staff interested in gardening and community enrichment. I was responsible for making a proposal to administration staff for our participation and the formation of our Garden Club. The Club had to be academically integrated into the classroom lessons.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

The major concerns are:
1. Community enrichment—Groups working together to beautify our community and use our natural resources.
2. Education and participation of our youth (schools)—All the students need to be aware and involved in the project because they are stakeholders and the future of the community.
3. Wholesome, organic food—Our community doesn’t have this resource from retailers and need to provide them ourselves.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

Urban Oasis provided staff to work with teachers and students on planned lessons in the garden and hands-on gardening activities—materials and scheduled timeslots. Teachers were required to give input for the lessons to continue the lessons into the classroom as science, math, reading, and physical education requirements. During spring, summer, and fall, CMS in Bloom went to the garden weekly, which required planning and sacrifice of structured schoolroom time.
4. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?

Yes, the students enjoy making their environment beautiful and making (growing) their own food. We have networked with many other groups in our community on sharing resources and building community pride.

No resource should lay in waste. The land should be used to grow our bodies, minds, and spirit as a community. The children and teachers had to make a connection between our school life and community life as halves of a whole.

5. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through?

More time needed as a group, all community, to talk and let each other know what our future hopes, goals, and dreams are. We have to work more uniformly to maximize our efforts and resources—planning committees and more weekend activities are necessary. People are able to come out more on the weekends and participate than during the weekdays. Resource systems—books or computer for new groups to get up to speed on the gardening techniques and questions or more staff to do one-on-ones.
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name: Charles Curry  
Title: Farm Intern

Organizations: CEED youth program  
Telephone: (202) 547-3024

Address: 1657 C St., NE  
City/State/ZIP: Washington, DC

Fax:  
E-mail: charlescurry@yahoo.com

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Signature: see following copy

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

   I got involved with CEED [the old name for the youth program] /Community Harvest by them being at my school. First I just signed up because they gave you community service hours, then I got into the program and I started to learn about gardening and I enjoyed it, and I still enjoy it now.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

   The major issue was that the people around the neighborhood didn't have a grocery store close by, so Urban Oasis decided to grow food and sell it at a good [price] so the people would have food and it was close by for them to get it.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

   [no comment]
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

4. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?

Yes, I think so because we get so many helpers at the farm who respect us and what the organization is working for. We also with the help are able to harvest the food which we sell at the local market for a good price and people at the market appreciate it. So from this I think this project made the community better.

5. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through?

I would change nothing.
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name: Charles Curry
Title: Intern
Organization: CEED
Telephone: (302) 547-3024
Address: 1657 C St. N.W.
City/State/ZIP: Washington, D.C.
Fax: 
E-mail: charlescurry60@yahoo.com

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Signature: Charles Curry

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

   I got involved with CEED/Community Harvest by them being at my school. I first just signed up because they gave you community service hours. Then I got into it and I started to learn about gardening and I really enjoyed it and I still enjoy it now.

2. From the community point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

   The major issue was that the people around the neighborhood didn't have a grocery store close by. So Urban Oasis decided to grow food and sell it at a good price so the people would have food and it was close by for them to get it.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name: Annie Dunlap
Title: Ward 8 Market vendor
Organization
Telephone: (202) 563-5514
Address: 1306 Barnaby Terrace, SE
City/State/ZIP: Washington, DC 20032
Fax: ___________________
E-mail: ___________________

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Signature: Annie Dunlap

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

In 1998, the only supermarket in the area closed. The founders of Community Harvest and the Ward 8 Farmers’ Market [John Friedrich and John Glossner, respectively] invited my friend Sally to be a market vendor. Sally asked me to work as her partner. We chose to do the market because elderly folks and others could not get to the nearest store to buy their groceries. We started out selling homemade pies and later began selling fruits and vegetables. The first year, there was also Shirley (selling spices), Rhonda (selling vegetables), and a man selling fish.

2. From the community point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

I didn’t hear about any complaints. Transportation and convenience were big issues. It was easy for the community to shop at our market. People liked that we sell good vegetables at a low price, and that the vendors are polite and friendly. Safeway’s prices were higher, the service was not as good, and the vegetables were not as fresh. That is, before it closed.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

There were no trade-offs.
4. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?

I enjoy going out there every Saturday. Everyone who works there enjoys it. It is very convenient for the old folks who do their shopping there. I believe that they eat healthier because of the market. Virginia [the market coordinator] provides recipes and samples for things like zucchini, which helps people know how to prepare the vegetables. It’s nice for us vendors to earn some spending change for ourselves.

5. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through?

We wish that we’d gotten more purple string beans and spices. We’d also like to start carrying meat like salt pork to cook with the greens. We could sell more if the Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers [a government program to improve the nutrition of WIC recipients] were good for more months out of the year, not just May through October.
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
PROFESSIONAL
CONSULTANT
PERSPECTIVE
PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by a professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, legal, or other services. Copies may be given to other professionals if desired.

Name JIM WARECK  Title Government Consultant
Organization WARECK Consulting  Telephone (301) 865-7052
Address 505 716 st NW  2nd Floor  City/State/ZIP WASH, DC 20004
Fax (301) 478-5165  E-mail WARECK Consulting

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1. What role did you or your organization play in the development of this project?

I aided Community Harvest in securing the continued use of the land that they use for their farm from the District and Federal governments. My work was a pro bono contribution to Community Harvest.

2. From your perspective, how was the project intended to benefit the urban environment?

My project, by continuing to allow Community Harvest to grow, is central to the mission of the group. This impact on both the urban environment and urban environments are significant in that it provides a wise use of the land and all the positive environmental benefits as well as providing a nutritious, low-cost food source to a needy population.

3. Describe the project's impact on its community. Please be as specific as possible.

This project impacts the community through its education process and its end result of providing nutritious foods to an underserved population.
PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

4. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

Community Harvest was terrific in their willingness to work with the Federal bureaucracy to forge a compromise that all parties could live with. They were willing to make concessions on water rates and land uses that greatly facilitated the agreement with the federal and District of Columbia's government. I served as liaison with the governments.

5. How might this project be instructive to others in your profession?

This project shows others that shared goals can be reached with patience and understanding.

6. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

Most successful was the result which allows for the continued use of the land. What could be helpful in the future is better planning and oversight of the lands by the government.
2003
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
ARCHITECT
OR DESIGNER
PERSPECTIVE

RUDY BRUNER AWARD
FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE
ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by a design professionals who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services. Copies may be given to the other design professionals if desired.

Name: APOLLINE MCCRAY  Title: LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Organization: LEE & ASSOCIATES, INC.  Telephone: (202) 410-6 410-6 K20
Address: 1230 14TH ST NW  WASHINGTON, DC
Fax: (202) 410-6 410-82  E-mail: amccray@leeandassociatesinc.com

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Signature

1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc.

The design concept is to create spaces that assist in educating the local community about growing and eating healthy foods and the natural processes that occur in an urban environment.

The proposed area is a five acre undeveloped site on the grounds of a historic hospital. There are a number of existing structural elements on site, some of which currently have historic designation. Seven large greenhouse structures are located at the existing entrance and are currently in a state of disrepair. One or more of these greenhouses may fit the criteria to become a historic structure. There is a historic mansion on site that also needs to undergo rehabilitation. Finally, there is a six foot historic brick wall that separates the hospital from the community.

Community Harvest currently uses approximately 40,000 sq. ft. on this site for vegetable production.

Some urban design considerations include: connections to the community, security, zoning regulations, environmental feasibility studies, long term area master planning, and required visual restrictions of an adjacent military base. Plant material choices, how and where they are used is key to the project. Not only must plants provide healthy foods, they must also function as a learning tool for lessons in horticulture, farming, and the complexities of the urban ecosystem.

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design.

There are seven important programming elements for the project:
1. Community Connections — Attractive park settings that draw the public in. Entrances will provide information about the organization and its programs.
2. Food Production — Large scale organic vegetable, herb and flower gardens that will provide crops for harvest and sale to surrounding lower income communities.
3. Learning Laboratory — Pavilions, indoor structures and greenhouses which will accommodate workshops, meetings, offices, indoor plant growing and storage space.
4. Animals — Observation and petting area for local farm animals, as well as, nesting zones for local wildlife.
5. Environmental Stewardship — Exploration of natural systems in the urban environment through native wildlife habitats. Facilities that accommodate waste management practices through composting and recycling.
6. Fruit Orchards — Areas designated for the study of fruit plants/trees and the sale of fruit.
7. Discovery Gardens — Specialty gardens that allow for exploration of unique plant features, such as butterfly gardens, medicinal gardens, winter gardens, and cent gardens.
ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services. Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name: Adrienne McCray
Title: Landscape Architect
Organization: Lee and Associates, Inc.
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E-mail: amccray@leeandassociatesinc.com

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Signature: see previous page

1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc.

   The design concept is to create spaces that assist in educating the local community about growing and eating healthy foods and the natural processes that occur in an urban environment. The proposed area is a five acre undeveloped site on the grounds of a historic hospital. There are number of existing structural elements on site, some of which currently have historic designation. Seven large greenhouse structures are located at the existing entrance and are currently in a state of disrepair. One or more of these greenhouses may fit the criteria to become a historic structure. There is a historic mansion on site that also needs to undergo rehabilitation. Finally, there is a six foot historic brick wall that separates the hospital from the community. Community Harvest currently use approximately 40,000 sq. ft. on this site for vegetable production.

   Some urban design considerations include: connections to the community, security, zoning regulations, environmental feasibility studies, long term area master planning, and required visual restrictions of an adjacent military base. Plant material choices, how and where they are used is key to the project. Not only must plants provide healthy foods, they must also function as a learning tool for lessons in horticulture, farming, and the complexities of the urban ecosystem.

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design.

   There are seven important programming elements for the project:

   1. Community Connections – Attractive park settings that draw the public in. Entrances will provide information about the organization and its programs.
   2. Food Production – Large scale organic vegetable, herb and flower gardens that will provide crops for harvest and sale to surrounding lower income communities.
   3. Learning Laboratory – Pavilions, indoor structures and greenhouses which will accommodate workshops, meetings, offices, indoor plant growing and storage space.
   4. Animals – Observation and petting areas for small farm animals, as well as, nesting zones for local wildlife.
   5. Environmental Stewardship – Exploration of natural systems in the urban environment through native wildlife habitats. Facilities that accommodate waste management practices through composting and recycling.
   6. Fruit Orchards – Areas designated for the study of fruit plants/trees and the sale of fruit.
   7. Discovery Gardens – Specialty gardens that allow for exploration of unique plant features, such as butterfly gardens, medicinal gardens, winter gardens, and cent gardens.
3. Describe the major challenges of designing this project and any design trade-offs or compromises required to complete the project.

The major challenge is the financial limitations. In order for this project to be feasible, phasing plans need to be developed to prioritize the use of available funding in a way that will maximize the long term results.

Other challenges include the existing conditions. The existing structures and surrounding topography, really frame the space in a way that makes it a challenge in organizing the various programming elements within it. Traffic flow (visitor, worker, vehicular) through and around the space was also a challenge to create.

4. Describe the way in which the project relates to its urban context.

The current site is on the grounds of a historic hospital where farming was done to provide vegetables for the patients. This area is currently being used by Community Harvest for their vegetable garden. There are existing natural wooded buffers around the site that the design will compliment. The nature of this being a community based project makes the connection to the adjacent communities an important relationship.

5. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the project's design and architecture.

The strength of the project includes the year round opportunities and interest that will be created through plants species chosen. The greenhouses, winter gardens, and covered spaces work to accommodate this feature. Areas of transition between designated programmed spaces are also a strong point because they feature educational information with some hands on exercises, such as, picking fruit, discovering plant colors and textures or what the nest of a specific animal in the wild looks and feels like. These transition zones are also fixed learning elements and can continue to work during off peak times of the year for plants with only seasonal interest.

Another strong point that is important is the community involvement and designing spaces that accommodate this.

Weaknesses of the project design include lack of visibility to and from the adjacent community because of the wall. The visual buffers that need to be created to protect the adjacent military base will reduce the wonderful existing vista of the city.
2003

RUDY BRUNER AWARD

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Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

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Signature  unavailable

1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

   In the last year Community Harvest implemented an environmental education program called Living, Learning Laboratory. As the late Education Coordinator my responsibility was to engage students in subjects including conservation, nutrition, plant & soil science, compost, environmental justice and sustainable food systems. Urban Oasis farm or “mini-garden,” is an interactive classroom for students.

   On the farm students complement their classroom learning through physical involvement in growing a sustainable food source for underserved community members. Student’s enthusiasm for learning through action is complemented by a sense of accomplishment and the knowledge that they provide a valuable food resource in their community.

2. Describe the impact that this project has had on your community. Please be as specific as possible.

   Students enrolled in the Living, Learning Laboratory (LLL) Program visit the farm during their school day 1 ½ hours, one day a week for six weeks. Often, these class trips are made by schools located within walking distance of the Urban Oasis Farm. Home of Urban Oasis is the Anacostia neighborhood. Thousands of students live and go to school in this community meaning that students find a greater investment in their neighborhoods as they grow and nourish their gardens at Urban Oasis.

   One of my favorite stories of Urban Oasis is about a LLL student named Erin. One morning Erin came to his LLL class with the rest of his South East Academy Elementary School classmates. Later that day, I stopped by the farm to prepare for the next day’s lessons when I noticed some young boys working in the field with Nicole. It was Erin and a friend he brought along. I asked Erin what he was up to and he answered, “I wanted to check on the garden, make sure everything’s all right.” Still smiling from his response, next I asked him how he got in knowing a locked gate was at the entrance, “we climbed the fence!” At that moment I knew we were growing more than a garden in Anacostia, a sense of pride and ownership was being sown as well.
3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

The Living, Learning Laboratory Program has a very limited budget. This translated into a creative use of materials and a great deal of personal investment into a very original program. For example, easels, beverages, and means of finding shade were all difficulties until creativity lent to creative construction. Painted stones and broken cement blocks made dry-erase board holders, maintenance crew coolers made a likeable cold water dispenser, and the use of an old tarp and painted stakes made a resilient “Shade Hut.”

Sometimes now, its hard to see these trials as limitations, no doubt limited funds did create a great deal of frustration, however; today, looking back from a safe distance each rock painted by a student was one more piece of the farm a proud student contributed for its (and arguably, their) betterment.

4. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

A wonderful success of Living, Learning Laboratory is our commitment to the original goal of outreach to lower-income Washington, DC youth traditionally overlooked in the area of environmental education. Through their hands-on class/farm- work students are empowered by learning where their food comes from, how to improve their health, and what it means to lead a more sustainable existence.

On the other hand, the program has not been confined only to successes. During summer months, while school is out, Living, Learning Laboratory partners with Boys and Girls Clubs, Head Start Programs, mentoring groups and other student age groups of youth who would like to be involved in the program. In the past, this has proven to be difficult due to the lack group discipline and unity. Often the groups are very large with resource and energy exhausted group leaders. In response to these difficulties, Community Harvest took steps to revise the program. For example one of the new strategies is a registration period that requires a meeting with group leaders regarding LLL rules and expectations both of students and group leaders. We are confident that this verbal reinforcement to the written contracts will aid in mutual understanding as well as improve the richness of the education program.