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Health Food in the Inner City: An Interview with Brian Noy about Augsburg's Campus Kitchen

What is Campus Kitchen? How does it serve the needs of the community?

The Campus Kitchen at Augsburg College works to make healthy food accessible to all in and around the Cedar Riverside Neighborhood. The program is a component of the Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning and shares the goal of creating a



healthy community through education and service. The Kitchen provides for basic needs, service learning, leadership development, and genuine engagement between the college and the community. We have four components that all work to make learning happen through connections with food and the community:

- *Food to Share*: 2,000 meals are served each month by volunteers and service learners to youth programs, homeless shelters, seniors, and community centers. Most of the meals are created from the surplus food from A'viands/Augsburg Dining; some are prepared from scratch in our Campus Cooking Classes.
- *Food to Grow*: Our community garden provides over 80 spaces for organizations and people from the neighborhood and campus to grow their own food, as well as food for the meal program.
- *Food to Buy*: Our two farmers markets on campus and at the Brian Coyle Community Center allow local producers to provide for the nutritional needs of the community. Markets run on Tuesdays through the summer and even accept EBT/food stamps.
- *Food to Know*: Educational programming helps college students, neighborhood youth, and others make connections between food, health, and the environment by developing cooking and gardening skills.

How does this program bring Augsburg and the neighborhood together?

Clearly, the low income neighborhood that Augsburg calls home can use fresh and healthy meals. The garden originally aimed to beautify a blemished corner of campus, and to provide growing spaces to the many interested gardeners who live in the nearby high-rise apartment buildings. There is also no nearby grocer that sells a substantial selection of fresh produce, and the farmers market fills that niche.

Our meal program is now led by student leaders with support from students who volunteer from their own interest, or have a service-learning requirement in a course. The garden includes about 100 individual plots, 25 of which are managed by students, 25 by Augsburg employees, 25 by neighbors, and 25 by community organizations, including clinics, schools, and churches.

In fact, Augsburg has a deep history of training the neighborhoods' immigrant community, beginning with its Norwegian teachers, social workers, and pastors. That history continues today as we serve Somalis, Mexicans, and others. The program clearly demonstrates the college's commitment to service-learning and experiential education across lines of race, education, income, and religion.

It sounds like a really successful program. Do you face ongoing challenges?

It's a great program, one that offers a lot of room for creativity. The garden is a great example of a campus space that has been fully integrated with the community, where all sorts of amazing (and sometimes dramatic) connections occur. In it, we have students working alongside other newer and often lifelong gardeners and farmers from all over the world. The biggest challenge is with liability and licenses concerns; we need to make sure that our activities fit into the expectations of insurers and city inspectors. It always works out, but seems to occupy a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

How did you come to these sustainability efforts? What's next?

I was an undergraduate at Augsburg, and I loved working with campus and community members to make a sustainable campus and neighborhood. I have that same feeling now as a staff member as I work with idealist and creative students. Now that the program is nearly a decade old, and the heart of our operation is well established, we have more energy and time to explore other creative avenues, such as the farmers market and connections to other local farms.

BRIAN NOY serves as the Director of Campus Kitchen at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota.