



2025 NEWSLETTER

EARTH ALMANAC



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SHARING COMMON GROUND, CULTIVATING CONNECTION

1603 N RIVERFRONT DR
MANKATO, MN 56001



A CASE FOR NONPROFITS

BY LAURA MARSALA PETERSON

LEC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



In our annual newsletter, I typically share a heartfelt message that praises the work of the Living Earth Center. While those messages are always genuine and share the true spirit of what we do at LEC, this year, I'd like to scale back further than the day-to-day services that Living Earth Center provides to make a case for nonprofits.

As the news cycle continues to recycle stories of turmoil, it's easy to become numb to the challenges of our times. It's easy to become overwhelmed and tune out the noise of need. If you just "can't even anymore," I see you. But I want to ask you to dig a little deeper for the sake of the long term, to narrow your focus to where the world needs you the most, your own neighborhood.

Federal funding cuts, freezes on government grant contracts, economic uncertainty, and geopolitical turmoil, juxtaposed to an ongoing rise in the need for services due to inflation and cuts to services for the most vulnerable (Medicaid, SNAP benefits, and reduced social services to name a few), have created quite the weight for nonprofits.

The US nonprofit sector comprises approximately 5.2% of the GDP (it makes up for \$108 billion in economic activity in the state of MN alone). It provides an intricate network of public services that City, State, and County Governments struggle to deliver.

Nonprofits can fill the gaps in ways that other entities can't, serving as a fall-back net for local societies to function. I think it can sometimes be hard to see this net if you don't actively work in the sector or don't utilize the services provided. If you think of basic human needs (food, water, housing, safety), there is likely a local nonprofit attempting to provide it in just about every community.

In a sense, without the services that the nonprofit sector offers, our local communities would face a significant economic and social toll. They work in a symbiotic relationship with the government and private sector to not only address the basic needs of the public, but also create spaces for economic, creative, and community-building

opportunities and innovation.

I am making a case not just for the work of the Living Earth Center, which I believe provides an essential public service, but also for the nonprofit sector in your local community that weaves a social web that often goes unnoticed until it is no longer there.

During this time of extreme turmoil and divisiveness, nonprofits can connect people in ways that foster stronger social and economic ecosystems. During these challenging times, we are ever more dependent on the love, support, and encouragement of those who believe in our mission. This is a case not only for nonprofits, but also for the thousands of staff, volunteers, and donors who help make those missions possible.

We have more work to do than ever, and together we can transmute challenge into opportunities. Please consider giving a local nonprofit a little more love than usual, either with a financial contribution or your time.

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- Meetings scheduled for the 3rd Monday of every other month
- Next Meeting: September 15
- Welcome to new members: Ben Elston, Brenda Flannery, Monse Perez Barrios, and our new SSND Ministry Commission Representative, Patrice Halbach.
- Thank you to members whose terms have ended during the past year: Jim Ackil & Ben Brzeski



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SEED TO SAUCE PROGRAM'S SECOND YEAR

A CONVERSATION WITH LEC PROGRAM MANAGER CORA UYIGUE

In its second year, our Youth Gardening Program, Seed to Sauce, is full to bursting with students, vegetables, and learning! Curriculum has expanded and a number of new groups have partnered with us. We sat down with LEC Program Manager, Cora Uyigue, to chat about what all this growth looks like for the program.

LEC: How did the experiences of the first year of s2s help to inform this year's programming?

CU: In the first year of the program, each class I taught was the first time I taught that lesson plan. It was my test year to see if my curriculum worked well in practice once I was in front of kids. Every time I taught a lesson, I would learn new ways of teaching that were more efficient and more fun for the kids. I would also get ideas for new programming that I wanted to try for next year. By the end of the season, I had learned so much and had found a flow in my teaching style, which made it easier for me to write curriculum for the next season.

LEC: How has the program evolved in its second year?

CU: Since last year, we added three new partners, including Head Start, Monroe, and a group of bilingual students from Prairie Winds. Returning partnerships expanded in student enrollment. The first year, we had 908 students enrolled, with 1507 interactions during the season. This year, we have 1175 students enrolled and have had 1227



interactions since the start of the program in March, and we still have two months of programming to go! We have also added new programming, and are joined by two interns from MNSU's dietetics program.

LEC: Half-way through this growing season, what surprises have you found?

CU: I am surprised how much easier it feels to run the programming this year than the first year, despite how much the program has grown. It shows how valuable experience, improved planning, and extra support are in making things go smoothly.

LEC: How has having the MNSU interns added value to the program?

The MNSU interns, Jean and Jeana, have been so wonderful to have. They bring so much joy to the students and have truly helped make the teaching process easier by

having extra hands and minds with the kids. They provide their expertise in dietetics and nutrition to activities with food that I would have never thought of, adding a new layer of learning to the Seed to Sauce experience.

LEC: Can you talk a bit about a new curriculum you have added this year?

CU: One new program is an expansion on a lesson from last year, which adds a nutritional component called Flowers, Fruits, and Water. Students learn the connection between flowers and fruit, and learn how fruits and vegetables help keep us hydrated. Students pick flowers from the garden, including chamomile and mint, and we learn how flowers develop into the fruits and vegetables we eat. Then we make fruit water using cucumber, strawberries, and lemon, and make chamomile mint tea. The interns teach about why water is important for our bodies and how we can use fruits and vegetables to get more water in our diets.

LEC: Anything else you would like to add?

CU: It has been a joy to be a part of this programming and to see the reactions from students, teachers, and parents. It is so valuable that youth have hands-on experiences in learning where their food comes from, the value of eating fresh food, and practicing stewardship for the environment and their community. The word about the programming has spread in just one year, so I expect it to reach even more students next year!

SAVE THE DATE



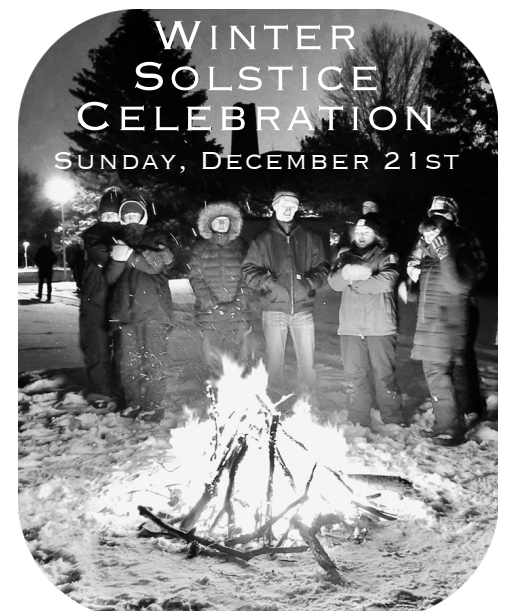
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11TH

FALL FARM
FEST

20th Annual
Earth
Conference



Saturday, November 1st



WINTER
SOLSTICE
CELEBRATION
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21ST

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

PAMELA KITTELSTON

I am Pamela Kittleston and I live in St. Peter, MN with my partner, Paul. We both enjoy gardening. We tend several shade gardens, which mix color and texture from flowers and foliage. In the small patches of sun that we have, we grow tomatoes, basil, cucumbers (an heirloom variety from seed savers this year), garlic and shallots (because they are easy) and strawberries.

I grew up in Colorado and learned to garden from my mother. She kept a huge garden from which she canned vegetables and pickles to feed us through the winter. She canned fruit and made jams. Opening those jars on a snowy morning was like sunshine!

She taught me how to raise, prepare, and appreciate fresh, simple food and its unparalleled nourishment. Seeing how tiny specks of seed grew with only water, good soil, and light fascinated me.

Watering, weeding and picking insects off

plants piqued my interest in the botanical world. I am a plant ecologist at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter. I love teaching students about how plants eat light, tell time, and sense and respond to neighbors or predators.

The green world also nourishes us beyond calories. We celebrate, decorate, mourn and adorn using plants from cradle to grave.

I learned about Living Earth Center (LEC) from Jim Vonderhaar and Steve Druschel. They invited Paul and me to an LEC summer fundraiser - a wine and cheese tasting in the Community Garden. We love all things food, wine, and gardens. It was a lovely event.

For me it was a no brainer to take the next step and become donors. LEC resonates with our values and outlook. We like LEC's mission supporting people's love of fresh, organic produce, and to educate and build



community via gardens and food. We appreciated the community and grassroots approach. Being a sustaining donor automates my giving. It is easy. I want to do this and it doesn't require me to have to remember to contribute each month.

Making a garden is the first thing I do when I move somewhere new. It becomes home after I can do that. As such, I love that LEC offers plots to people who may be new to gardening or new to Mankato and the U.S. I love that people from around the globe can share the vegetables they grow with others; they can talk about and learn how land, soil and plants shape culture and memory.

YOUR DONATIONS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

We know that current times are uncertain and economically challenging for many of you. While we are all feeling pressure, those most effected are our community members already struggling with food insecurity and hunger.

Community Growing Spaces play an important role in leveling the playing field. They insure anyone who wants to grow their own food has space to do so. They also ensure that fresh organic produce is available to the most vulnerable members of our community.

Through our Community Food Connection (CFC) Programs, LEC directly connects people to the land and to healthy organic produce. Your support of these programs is needed now more than ever.

Donations of all amounts make a big impact at a local level.

If you are interested in becoming a legacy sponsor by putting LEC in your estate plan, please contact our Executive Director Laura Marsala Peterson at lpeterson@livingearthcentermn.org.

LEC's Community Food Connection Program Includes:

- **Youth Gardening Initiative** - Includes summer gardening classes with youth from MY Place, Loyola, and ISD77 ages pre-K to teens. In 2024, our Seed to Sauce Program connected over 1,000 area youth with a hands-on gardening experience.
- **Produce Donation** - Last year, over 2900 lbs of fresh organic produce was donated to community partners like ECHO Food Shelf, St. Peter Food Shelf, and FOCP Summer Food Program.
- **Emerging Growers** - Program has grown from 3 to 17 participants. We are working with Growers to create pathways to enter the local food economy.
- **Community Garden Partnerships** - Our flagship partnership with MNSU School of Allied Health and Nursing running the dementia-friendly Eng-AGE-ment Garden is in its 7th year!
- **Community Garden Scholarships** - Annually, LEC provides an average of 12 scholarships, ensuring that anyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, has access to land to grow food for themselves and their families.

If you would like to become a monthly sustaining donor, either scan the QR code to the right or return the pledge card below and check the "make this a monthly donation" box.



DONATE TODAY!

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LEC could not operate without the donations of time, talent, and treasure from such a vibrant and generous community of supporters.

Our sincerest thank you to each and every one of you.

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Virginia Carr
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Ellyn Kelly
Jack Kelly
Trista Knoll
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Adam Massmann
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Patsy Schultz
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Alan Thom
Mark Traxler
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DJ Williams
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Lakshman S Bika
Sara Biocic
Kyle Boger
Ryan Bolte
Jade Bundy

Adam Chase
Kylee Cherotich
Maxwell Clark
Grey Clements
Ronette Cole
Shayna Cram
Evan Darling
Abbey Dickhudt
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Jack Kelly
Wonyeong Kim
John Krippner
Jeremy Kuznia
LCC E-Sports Group
LDS Youth Group
Scott Leonard
Carol Marsala
Kyshaira Martin
MSU Student Group
Jude Pitschka
Ean Pringnitz
Lynn Rozen
Jordyn Rusten
Sally Sichler
Talia Smalling
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GROWING TOGETHER: SOLACE COMMUNITY GARDEN

BY MAL MURPHY, LEC GARDEN MANAGER

The first year (2024) at Solace, we had difficulty with the soil not having a lot of nutrients. It was really sandy and meant for more pollinator/native plants. I came in with the thought that we would be able to grow similar things as we do at Good Counsel, not realizing that the soil on the hill has been replenished and taken care of for 50+ years. This year, we changed from planting our vegetables directly into the ground to using raised beds.

I also changed my approach for the garden club this year. I realized that not everyone loves the dirty and hard work of gardening. A lot of the residents really just wanted a low-maintenance place to grow easier plants and do more fun garden projects like crafts.

By incorporating fun activities and a watering and weeding schedule, I found that the members took more responsibility for their plants when we stuck to a garden schedule and had fun things to look forward to doing while also gardening.

This year, we have a whole new set of garden members. Everyone is dealing



Solace Garden Club members design and decorate club t-shirts as part of their weekly club meetings.

In its second year, the Community Garden at Solace Apartments in St. Peter is a collaboration between LEC and Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership.

with different life changes. For example, last year one of our members had just had a baby, and it was too hard for her to stay out in the sun for long periods and be able to commit to the club every week, so we lost her participation halfway through the summer. This year, she is gardening again, and her baby is walking around and helps pick flowers and really has brought a positive influence on the garden club's mood!

Every week, I send all the group members a text the morning we are going to meet. I want the members to know I will for sure be there and it keeps us all accountable. For the first 30 minutes of club, we usually check if the beds need to be watered and pull up any easy weeds. The members usually have a lot of

questions about what kind of plants are growing because a lot of them are learning to garden for the first time and are learning to recognize the look of certain plants. Then for the remaining 30 minutes, we usually have some sort of activity that I bring, like filling our bird feeders, organizing our shed, an art activity, or even just sitting in the shade and talking. It gives us all a chance to enjoy the fruits of our labor, literally!

2024: A LOOK BACK



LEC hired local artist Justin Ek to design and install a mural for the shed at the Community Farm. In October, volunteers gathered for an afternoon of community fun to help paint the mural.



In partnership with KMSU, LEC hosted *Music on the Hill*, a concert featuring local musicians Minnesota Goodbyes and Liz Draper.

Here are a few of our 2024 highlights:

- Over 2900 lbs of fresh organic produce, grown by LEC Staff, Volunteers, and Emerging Growers was donated to our community partners
- Our Community Garden was full with 105 gardeners and their families, growing healthy food and quality relationships. 16 garden scholarships were awarded, ensuring everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, had access to land to grow food.
- Four Emerging Growers participated in our Local Foods Purchase Assistance Grant Program. They were reimbursed a total of over \$5,000 for produce they grew and donated. Much of the donated produce was culturally significant - greens like saga and managu, common in East Africa, but not readily available in Southern Minnesota.
- In its inaugural year, 1507 youth attended 60 workshops as part of our Seed to Sauce Program. Partners included ISD 77, MY Place, Loyola, YMCA, Generations Child & Memory Care, and the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota.
- 385 volunteer hours were logged at the Blue Earth County Community Farm by over 100 individual volunteers. Volunteers play an integral part in the success of our Produce Donation Program.



LEC prepared an offrenda as part of Mankato's Day of the Dead Celebration.

With hearts full of gratitude, we honor those who have gone before us. We carry on their legacy with intention and love.



In September, LEC hosted *A Taste of the Garden*, a fundraiser dinner where attendees were served a multi-course, gourmet meal in the very garden where much of the food they ate was grown.

REAL FOOD FOR REAL PEOPLE

CHEESY MALAWAX LAYERED BEEF STIR FRY BAKE

BY RUKAYAH JAMEA, LEC SUMMER INTERN

I grew up eating malawax, a soft Somali pancake that's always been a favorite in our home. We usually serve it with meat stew, or even just a cup of tea. One morning, we had some leftover stir-fry in the fridge and a bit of extra cheese, so we decided to get creative. We layered the malawax with the stir-fry, added cheese in between like a lasagna, and popped it in the oven. It turned out way better than we expected. Now it's a fun twist we make whenever we're craving something filling, and a little different. The best flavors often come from leftovers and a little creativity.



Malawax

Ingredients :

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 ¼ cups milk
- 2 large eggs
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- ½ cup of melted butter or olive oil

Instruction:

- In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients except for butter or oil. Use a whisk, hand mixer, or handheld blender to mix until smooth. Avoid over mixing
- Heat frying pan over medium heat and lightly coat the surface with butter or oil.
- Using a ladle, scoop the mixture until nearly full, then pour it into the pan. Swirl the pan to spread the batter into a thin even layer that reaches the edges.
- Cook the malawax for 1 to 2 minutes on one side, then flip and cook the other side for another 1 to 2 minutes, or until golden brown.
- When ready, remove the malawax using a spatula and stack on a plate.
- Repeat for the rest of the batter.

Shredded Zucchini and Carrot Beef Stir Fry

Ingredients :

- ¼ cup cooking oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 4-5 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 Tbs cilantro, finely chopped
- 1 lb (450 g) ground beef
- 2 medium zucchini, shredded
- 3 medium carrots, shredded
- 2 Tbs salt (adjust to preference)
- 1 tsp turmeric powder
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 2 Tbs lemon juice

Instruction:

- Heat the oil in a large skillet or pan over medium heat
- Add the chopped onion and sauté for 2-3 minutes, until soft and translucent.
- Stir in minced garlic and cilantro and cook for 1 minute
- Add the ground beef and cook, breaking it apart, until browned and fully cooked.
- Mix in turmeric, salt, and black pepper, and stir to combine
- Add the shredded zucchini and carrots. Cook for 5-7 minutes, stirring often, until the vegetables are tender and any excess moisture has mostly evaporated.
- Stir in the lemon juice. Cook for 1 more minute, then remove from heat.
- Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.



Assembly and Topping

Ingredients :

- 2-3 cups shredded cheese
- 1 Tbs lemon zest (optional)
- 1 tsp black pepper (optional)

Instruction:

- Preheat oven to 375° F
- Grease pan (round spring pan preferred)
- Layer as follows: place two malawax, spread a layer of beef stir fry over them, then sprinkle shredded cheese on top.
- Repeat the layers until all the beef stir fry is used.
- Optionally, sprinkle lemon zest and black pepper on top for extra flavor.
- Cover with parchment paper or foil and bake for 20 minutes.
- Remove the foil or parchment paper and bake for another 10-15 minutes, until the cheese is melted and golden brown.
- Let cool slightly before serving.



HELP FEED YOUR COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AT THE COMMUNITY FARM!

We'd love to see you out at the BEC Community Farm! Volunteer opportunities are available for both groups and individuals. Scan QR code to the right or email our Farm Manager at communityfarm@livingearthcentermn.org for more information.



LOCAL ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



I am SkyAnne Walker, an enrolled member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. My people call ourselves Hocak, pronounced HoChunk, which means people of the sacred voice. I also have roots with the Anishinabe people. My mom recognized in me a desire to create things and taught me how to make dream catchers when I was a child. She also took me to a beading class. I took it up for a while, but moved away from it in my teen and young adult years.



After becoming a mother, I needed something to do after my daughters went to bed and I took up beading and dream catchers again. I eventually turned it into a business. My mom helped me in those early years, even suggesting the name Prairie Willow. Prairie is paying homage to the way our homelands used to be before colonization and agriculture took over. Willow is my favorite tree, and she was inspired by a large willow tree in our area.

My abilities have evolved over time and I would say I've been actively beading for over 16 years. I draw from the world around me for inspiration. I have been making the Mahkato Wacipi royalty crowns since 2021. Typically the planning committee picks colors, and based on those colors, I decide on the design. I really love to do floral designs, but I also try to challenge myself, choosing to make hummingbirds and butterflies. It is an honor to be able to share my work with the public through the royalty crowns each year and when I vend. I love creating works via special orders because they challenge me to think differently or to consider designs in a different way than I would normally. It is a way for me to grow as an artist.

You can learn more about SkyAnne and her work at:
<https://prairie-willow.com/>
 or on Facebook @ThePrairieWillow

