

Earth Day offers a world of good

BY CHRISTA BUCHANAN
C & G Staff Writer

Earth Day has come a long way since former Wisconsin governor and state Sen. Gaylord Nelson organized the first celebration on April 22, 1970.

According to "How the First Earth Day Came About," an article Nelson wrote prior to his death in 2005, the idea actually began in 1962 as a result of his dismay "that the state of our environment was a non-issue in the politics of the country." In 1969 at a conference in Seattle he announced that "the first nationwide grassroots demonstration on behalf of the environment" would be held in spring of 1970.

"Earth Day worked because of the spontaneous response at a grassroots level. ... That was the remarkable thing about Earth Day. It organized itself," wrote Nelson.

Earth Day initiatives have had a positive impact, according to earthday.gov: The air is cleaner today than in 1970; the trend of annual loss of wetlands has been reversed; and the restoration and redevelopment of abandoned industrial sites is accelerating.

Communities are improving recycling programs, organizing cleanups, and promoting locally grown organic foods and green products, among other initiatives.

Capuchin Soup Kitchen dinner highlights local, seasonal food

To commemorate Earth Day, April 22, the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and its Earth Works urban garden ministry are holding a dinner event featuring fresh, seasonal food and presentations on the importance of local foods and maintaining a connection to the environment.

The feast also helps out the CSK, a nonprofit dedicated to providing food, clothing and spiritual counseling to those in need.

"There are many initiatives to increase local food access in southeast Michigan," CSK chef Alison Costello said. "The Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Earth Works garden believe that bringing awareness to what we eat and the impact of food on our society imbues the dining experience with a sense of joy and community."

At press time, the tentative menu listed spinach feta steak, raspberry chicken breast, vegan mushroom bouillabaisse, greens and ricotta torta, micro greens with vanilla infused vinaigrette and Michigan cherry crème brûlée. Costello and her assistant, Steven LaFraniere, will prepare it from scratch.

The Earth Works urban garden consists of three city garden sites and two greenhouses that produce more than 6,000 pounds of produce each season, a 22-hive honey apiary and composting sites. Earth Works supplies food for CSK, the Women Infant and Children Project Fresh, and community mini-marts. It produces natural products, such as jams, honey and hand balm, to sell. An Earth Works gift basket will be raffled at the event. Visit www.earth-works.org.

Youth farmers from the Earth Works Growing Healthy Kids Youth Farm Stand program will talk about the importance of fresh food in their community. Sister Liz Walters will share how the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Order established their newly "greened" Motherhouse and organic farm, and Michigan farmer Jeremy Moghtader of the Food System Economic Partnership and Michigan State University Student Organic Farm will discuss the Farm to School program, which brings fresh, local foods to schools.

Tickets for the dinner event are \$45 and must be purchased by April 19. Call (313) 579-2100, ext. 204. The dinner will be held 6-8 p.m. April 22 at CSK, 1264 Meldrum in Detroit. Visit www.cskdetroit.org or www.capuchins.org.

See EARTH on page 4A



Photo by Deb Jacques

Alison Costello, executive chef and manger of Capuchin Soup Kitchen's Meldrum site, and Patrick Crouch, CSK greenhouse and field coordinator, show off seedlings of the herbs and produce grown in the Earth Works green house.



Photo by Deb Jacques

From left, Capuchin Soup Kitchen "volunteers extraordinaire" Russ Krienbring of Center Line, Tony Haewski of Northville and Dr. Robert Murray of Trenton are just a few of the many volunteers that help CSK chef Alison Costello do prep work.



Photo provided by Immaculate Heart of Mary Order

The 1 1/2 acre organic farm at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Motherhouse in Monroe is just one aspect of IHM's newly greened campus and Motherhouse.

Earth

from page 3A

OU expo educates, entertains

The third annual Healthy People-Healthy Planet Earth Day Expo will be held 11 a.m.-6 p.m. April 19 at the Oakland Center on the Oakland University campus in Rochester.

“We hope to educate people about environmental problems ... and how it affects personal and community health, and then provide a laundry list of solutions,” said John Batdorf, expo manager. Experts from the Sierra Club, the Clinton River Watershed Council and VegMichigan, among others, will be on hand.

A collaboration of Oakland University and the nonprofit Upland Hills Ecological Awareness Center, the expo aims to educate attendees with indoor and outdoor exhibits, demonstrations and presentations.

“We are all at risk because our current mass produced food system is unsustainable. We use fossil fuels at every step. As this resource is depleting and getting increasingly expensive, we are less secure,” said Chris Tarr of UHEAC, expo program manager. “The good news is that many people are working to develop local and organic food production.”

“We tried to incorporate a variety of every consumer category, so people know that alternatives are available and what’s available locally,” said Batdorf, executive director of UHEAC. “We should talk about problems, but we also need to offer healthy alternatives.”

Experts will offer alternatives and give presentations on holistic fitness and nutrition, renewable energy, sustainable living, green building, alternative vehicles and transportation, and more. Attendees pick up product samples, taste natural foods, and enjoy free massages and yoga.

At the kid’s corner, kids can

make natural arts and crafts.

UHEAC, a designated Michigan Energy Demonstration Center in Oxford, provides seminars, presentations and activities “to promote healthy and sustainable relationships with the natural world and each other.” Visit www.uheac.org or call (248) 693-1021.

The Earth Day event, which is free and open to the public, is co-sponsored by Whole Foods Market, Saturn of Troy, RetroFoam of Michigan, Healing Garden Journal, DTE Energy-Green Currents, Choose Renewables, Body Mind and Spirits-Rochester Mills Restaurant, Irene’s Myomassology Institute, Edible WOW magazine and Mind Body Spirit Guide. Visit www.earthdayexpo.org.

Sisters of IHM put green principles to good use

The Sisters, Servants of Immaculate Heart of Mary Order’s “underlying directions” have guided them to “choose to build a culture of peace and right relationship among ourselves, with the Church, and with the whole Earth community.”

The IHM Sisters completely renovated the IHM Motherhouse and campus using green technologies and established an organic farm, among other projects.

“In a nutshell, the renovation stems from Catholic social teachings ... being socially and sustainably aware. The two big things are we have the geothermal heating and cooling — using the Earth as a radiator — and gray water recycling, which collects bath water and purifies it using nature,” said Sharon Venier, a staff assistant at IHM, adding that the water is then used to flush toilets.

These technologies, said Venier, have produced a savings of \$187,000 a year in energy and water costs — a 53 percent savings for water and 48 percent on energy costs.

Other renovations include using

such Earth-friendly products such as cork and low VOC paint, and reusing such materials as brick, millwork and marble.

“The building is huge, 376,000 square feet, and they really just did a wonderful job. You really have to see it person to fully appreciate it. What the Sisters have done is just incredible,” said Venier. More than 6,000 people have toured the Motherhouse and campus since renovations were completed in 2003.

The 238-acre campus in Monroe is also home to diverse vegetation, constructed wetlands, natural drainage systems, a 35-acre Oak Savanna preservation site and a 1 1/2 acre organic farm that provides food to the Sisters, volunteers in the farm’s Community Supported Agriculture program and local nonprofits.

“The key to organic growing is the soil,” said Sharon McNeil, IHM farm coordinator. “It’s kind of like our immune system — the healthier you are, the less likely you’ll get a disease.”

“We compost, use crop rotation, do companion planting ... sometimes we use horse or cow manure,” said McNeil, adding that worms also play a big part in a healthy garden, which is why every spring the Sisters and CSA members gather to bless the garden and offer worms.

“The blessing will be held June 14 at 10 a.m., and everyone is welcome to come. A lot of people take a worm either in a cup if they’re squeamish or in their hand. Worms aerate the soil and are good for the garden,” McNeil said.

The goal, said McNeil, of the organic farm and CSA, is to help people “really see that the land is sacred and that we are part of the land, and to have reverence for the land is essential.”

Visit www.ihmsisters.org.

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