



# The Good Food Exchange



Summer 2014

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## FDN's Neighborhood Food Hubs Successfully Expand Throughout Tompkins County

It's a sunny afternoon on the grounds of **Southside Community Center** in Ithaca, and the joint is jumpin'.

Southside's Congo Square Market, which runs every Friday afternoon, is definitely *the* place to be. People who have come to buy produce and prepared food are energetically socializing with friends and neighbors as if they haven't seen one another in ages.

The best part about being a Friendship Donations Network (FDN) "hub holder," according to Charles Rhody, nutrition and fitness coordinator at Southside, is "putting healthy food on the plates of the families we serve—kale and other fresh vegetables and fruits." A diet enriched by such foods "can help people prevent illnesses such as diabetes and eliminate toxins from their bodies," he says.

How does the program work? "Every Friday, the people who run the stand contribute to the FDN food hub any fresh food that doesn't get sold, and people who purchase produce from the stand often buy a little extra and put it in the cooler," Rhody explains.

Every fourth Friday, all the food collected goes directly to Southside's food pantry, which gives the food away the next day to community members in need. Rhody and others also collect and donate produce from Beverly J. Martin Elementary School's garden.

"It's great that we can now offer fresh fruits and vegetables, which our pantry clients normally can't afford," says Rhody.

On the other three Fridays, a "hub



*FDN volunteer Michael Charnoky's food hub in Ithaca is one of 11 that offer local gardeners an easy way to donate surplus veggies and fruits to community members in need.*

helper" brings the collected food to a walk-in cooler at FDN's headquarters at the Just Be Cause Center in Ithaca, where volunteers redistribute it to other local food pantries.

Improving people's overall health is one reason Southside became involved with FDN's food hubs, says Rhody.

"It's a great program," he says. "It would be even greater if it expanded to other places so that families in need throughout our area could have fresh fruits and vegetables every day and have long and healthy lives."

The Neighborhood Food Hub program, now in year two, has indeed expanded, says FDN program coordinator Meaghan Sheehan Rosen. There are more hub locations in Ithaca as well as hubs in Danby, Dryden, Groton, and Newfield.

Groton is at risk of becoming "a food desert," says Sara Knobel, manager of the **Groton Public Library**. "There's just a 7-Eleven and a dollar store."

Many residents—particularly the elderly—do not have much access to healthy, fresh food, says Knobel. Many can't afford cars, and public transportation isn't cheap and doesn't run often or stop at farm stands that sell fresh produce.

To remedy the situation, Knobel approached a couple who visited the library often and also ran an organic community-supported agriculture program called "Buried Treasure." Knobel arranged for the couple to donate their surplus fruits and vegetables to a food pantry at the library on what Knobel dubs "Healthy Tuesdays."

The library became a Neighborhood Food Hub during the summer as well as an official food pantry recipient throughout the year.

Its clients also benefit from whatever's ready for picking in a communal garden that Groton community members started on village property, according to Knobel. "I love introducing people to something they haven't had before, such as squashes and garlic scapes," she says.

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The fresh food not only “offsets hunger, but also improves people’s diets.”

“Four older women from senior housing come every week [for the free produce],” Knobel says. “One woman took my hand and said, ‘God bless you. It makes such a difference.’”

Judith Barker, board president of **Ithaca Community Gardens (ICG)**, says ICG got involved with FDN’s Neighborhood Food Hub program because members were “tired of seeing unpicked vegetables and fruits rot on the vine every August and September.”

“It’s outrageous that we throw food away while people go hungry in this land of plenty,” Barker says.

ICG’s current location at Carpenter Park near the Ithaca Farmers Market

consists of 150 plots, each 280 square feet, maintained by an equal number of gardeners. Three plots are set aside just for food donations.

The gardeners, who rent the land from the city for \$1 a year, plant a large variety of fruits and vegetables, including ones from places as far as Burma and Vietnam.

“Food justice is in ICG’s interest because we all grow and enjoy food,” Barker says. “Everybody has a right to healthy, nutritious, local, sustainable food.”

*By Linda Brandt Myers*

*For a more in-depth look at FDN’s Neighborhood Food Hubs and a full listing of hub operators and operating hours, visit [www.friendshipdonations.org/hubs](http://www.friendshipdonations.org/hubs).*



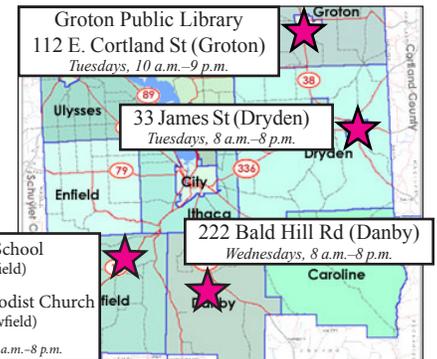
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**rescuing food, reducing hunger**

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*Locations of FDN Neighborhood Food Hubs in Ithaca and the surrounding towns. For more information, visit [www.friendshipdonations.org/hubs](http://www.friendshipdonations.org/hubs).*

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