

Engaging the Next Generation of Volunteers

The Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium Student Volunteers, St. Johnsbury

At all times, and particularly during an economic downturn, volunteers help associations in a variety of ways. It goes without saying that the relationship between a volunteer and an organization can be beneficial all the way around, and at the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium in St. Johnsbury, volunteerism is alive and well in a unique way.

While many organizations are open to student volunteers, the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium has created a volunteer program specifically for students. The museum’s Student Curator program is decades old, and was designed for kids ages 12 to 15, who are interested in providing educational experiences for the museum’s visitors. Each summer approximately 10 students work independently and in groups to research different themes such as weather, birds, butterflies, amphibians and wildflowers. They develop short presentations and supporting hands-on activities so that museum visitors can experience engaging programs every day. Education Coordinator and Museum Educator, Tara Holt, says that the Student Curators, “make the museum alive in a totally different way in the summer. The program allows the curators to feel like a part of the museum family and that is reflected in their work.”

Beginning in 2011, the Student Curators joined forces with the museum’s Community of Observers, a citizen science program in which participants record and report trends in the habits of a select group of birds, butterflies and wildflowers that may be sensitive to long-term shifts in weather patterns or changes in their habitats. Each week there is a field day, during which Student Curators go into the field to do data collection as called for by the Community of Observers program. The curators then present information related to that research in some of their programs for the public. Clearly, the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium Student Curators enhance the museum’s visitor experience, increase the knowledge base of the scientific community, and promote community involvement for the next generation.



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Investment in Local Restaurant Buys Food and More

Claire’s Community Supported Restaurant, Hardwick

CSA is an acronym that is becoming familiar to more and more people. It stands for Community Supported Agriculture, a model in which the consumer pays money up front to cover the start-up costs of a year’s production on a farm. In return, the shareholder receives fresh vegetables throughout the course of the farm season.

In Hardwick, a community that is passionate about local food, the same model has been put to use at a restaurant. CSR, standing for Community Supported Restaurant, is now a part of the vernacular.

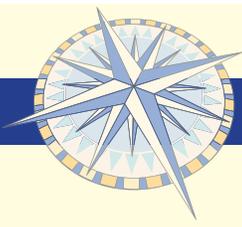
Claire’s Restaurant, located on Main Street in Hardwick, opened in May of 2008 thanks to 50 community members who committed \$1,000 each. Those subscribers receive their money back in the form of dinners. They each receive \$25 off a meal,



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10 months out of the year, for four years. In addition, much of the food that they eat at Claire’s is locally grown. 70% of their food dollars go directly to Vermont farmers and artisans. The farmers themselves often eat at Claire’s, and many of the restaurant’s servers also work on the local farms. Veronica, Claire’s General Manager, says that it’s wonderful to be able to say, “I’m your server, and I picked the kale that you’ll be eating today.” The commitment to local products doesn’t end with the food, but also includes the drinks. The bar serves all Vermont beer and vodka, and is trying to use as many small batch and artisan liquors as it can.

The commitment that those 50 community members made back in 2008 seems to have been a good one. Not only do they receive delicious, locally grown meals in return for their money, but also they helped to create a gathering place and a job training site in their community. Chef and owner, Steven Obranovich, provides training for high school and college students. It turns out that \$1,000 goes a long way in creating good food and a healthy community.

“I’m your server, and I picked the kale that you’ll be eating today.”

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A Good Idea that has Spread Like Compost

St. Johnsbury Academy – Composting Program, St. Johnsbury

“The academy is doing a lot right now,” says James Bentley, a St. Johnsbury Academy English teacher, when asked about the environmental initiatives at the school. Solar panels and a geothermal heating system are being installed in a new dormitory, and there is a new ropes course on campus. There also is a project that is less visible than these, but that still has big results.

The composting program at St. Johnsbury Academy began in earnest during the 2009-2010 school year through a senior capstone project. Seniors at the academy write proposals for projects that are intended to improve the school. Bentley supervised the composting program, which he says began with no funding and some 5-gallon buckets. Bentley, other faculty volunteers and students from the school’s National Honor Society chapter initially hauled the food scraps from their cafeteria to a farm in Lyndonville. After collecting 13 tons of food scraps in one winter, they quickly realized that they needed a more efficient means of dealing with the waste, so they turned to Wise Worms. Wise Worms is a business run by the LaPointe family, which provides compost bins to the school. The LaPointes pick up the bins, so Bentley and his students no longer need to haul them, and the containers are much nicer than the buckets that they used originally.

After switching to Wise Worms, St. Johnsbury Academy gave their 5-gallon buckets to Good Shepherd School, who also was interested in starting a compost program. Good Shepherd also had success with their project, and they’ve since moved to the Wise Worm model as well. Just as compost helps a garden grow, this project is spreading too.



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