

climate from the other side, the organization also advocates for particular policies at the Wilson Building. Members supported legislation calling for more transparency when the city elects to reward businesses with tax subsidies; there's currently no formal process. That bill didn't pass, but the group is considering a new proposal that would require an economic impact study, similar to an environmental impact study, when big box retailers of a certain size come in.

And then there's the organization's marketing arm, which consists of a website listing local businesses and relevant activities coming up, as well as a few promotional events. July 9-16, for example, the organization will be hosting Eat Local First, one of its most ambitious projects so far. It'll be a targeted campaign focusing on locally-grown food and the DC restaurants that serve it, and will include cooking demonstrations, discounts at specific restaurants akin to those that occur during restaurant week, garden tours, and a closing street party.

Gradually Reaching Out

The organization is a citywide one, but so far, members are largely concentrated in the Adams Morgan/U Street area. The group is slated to expand throughout the city, but will have to demonstrate its added usefulness beyond neighborhood-centric business groups like the Capitol Hill Association of Merchants and Professionals (CHAMPS).

Martha Huizenga is a partner at Capitol Hill-based DC Access, a local wireless internet service provider, and has been a member of Think Local First since 2009. She said the events she's attended have been interesting, but admitted that making the trek across town—most Think Local First get-togethers seem to be on U Street—can be a disincentive to participating, especially since she already has an established network of fellow business owners on the Hill through CHAMPS.

East of the river, business owners are used to taking care of themselves. Briony Hynson, creative director of Honfleur Gallery in historic Anacostia, wasn't particularly surprised to see that there were virtually no businesses from her neighborhood listed on the Think Local First website. "We frequently feel isolated from what's going on in the rest of the city," she explained.

In response, community boosters developed their own marketing initiative last year, titled Eat Shop Live Anacostia, to support local businesses. But Nikki Peele, the brains behind that initiative, said there's probably room for both groups to work in the area. "I applaud their efforts, and would like to see ways to work together," she said.

That shouldn't be too hard. Think Local First is ultimately designed to prod DC residents to think about their city in a new way, as one whose character is in part defined by the quirky, locally-owned businesses that serve it. It's an important campaign, because as the city swells and becomes a more popular destination, it will invariably attract more out-of-town retailers.

And that would be a shame, said Shallal. "I don't want Walmart to come here by default, because there's nothing better. I'd be devastated to have a Walmart next to me. I live in Adams Morgan and every space is unique, and I'd hate to see that be lost."

That's what the organization is trying to prevent, he continued. "We want to be the real chamber of commerce, the local chamber of commerce. With the regular chamber, they create a level playing field [for everyone], which doesn't serve local businesses. We don't want a level playing field. We create more jobs and pay more taxes—shouldn't we have the advantage?"

For more information go to <http://www.thinklocalfirstdc.com/>. ♦

A Garden for Sibley Plaza Senior Community

BY SONSRYEA TATE MONTGOMERY

Sibley Plaza Resident Council President Anne Clark is harvesting the fruits of her five-year effort to build an elaborate 1,500-square foot garden outside the seniors' residential building where she lives. Mark Bergel, founder of the Silver Spring based nonprofit A Wider Circle which secured a \$350,000



grant to build the garden from the TKF Foundation, joined Clark and dozens of her neighbors for the grand opening Wednesday, May 25, as D.C. Housing Authority Executive Director Adrienne Todman commended them for rolling up their sleeves to beautify their community.

The garden includes a meditative community space, a sitting area, an area for small group events, and a community garden, for the 250 seniors and individuals with disabilities who live in the facility, located at 1140 North Capitol Street, N.W.

"A renaissance has been underway in the District of Columbia, and this sense of revitalization and individual responsibility has not been lost on the residents at Sibley Plaza," Todman said. "With this beautiful garden, they have not only established a place for growing flowers, fruits and vegetables, they have planted seeds for continued cooperative efforts between the residents here, and harvested more quality-of-life enhancing benefits from their partnership started five years ago with A Wider Circle."

Clarke met Bergel at an event at Claridge Towers, another DCHA facility, and asked him to collaborate with her on events at Sibley Plaza. Bergel, who started his nonprofit ten years ago to address homelessness, poverty and substance abuse by providing individuals and families basic goods and services, liked Clarke's professional approach and they agreed a garden could provide more than dirt for growing flowers and food.

"We wanted a place where people could go to have a quiet place to contemplate and connect with nature. The impact of being able to look at beauty in nature and be in nature has a dramatic healing effect on individuals. It's life giving. No doubt about it," Bergel said. He was inspired by gardens outside Providence Hospital and the Whitman Walker Clinic in Virginia. "Nobody deserves it more than the people who live in Sibley Plaza," he added. "There's a mix of people – seniors and individuals with disabilities. They all deserve something beautiful."

He applied for the grant to build the garden at Sibley Plaza to extend the efforts of his Silver-Spring-based organization. Todman thanked him for reaching out and digging in.

"We thank Ms. Clarke and Mr. Bergel for exemplifying the kind of community-resident partnerships we encourage," Todman said. ♦