



SiCM News

Year 54 Number 2

Fall 2021

Photo from The Free Fall Farmers Festival - story on page 3

STEERING COMMITTEE 2021

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President

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Randy McGough, Treasurer

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Rev Tim Coombs, DMin

Rachel Curtis, LMSW

Shae Fitzgerald

Rev Nicolle Harris

Molain Gilmore

Melanie Puerto-Conte

Barbara Vivier

Emerita Member:

Shirley Readdean

Rev Amaury Tañón-Santos, DMin
Executive Director/CEO

THANK YOU to donors and attendees of our Fall Grand Opening Events! On October, 15, 2021 we will name the newly renovated food pantry after Rev Phil Grigsby.

MAKE AN IMPACT

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FARM FERMENTS

SCHENECTADY URBAN FARMS LATE SUMMER

Schenectady Urban Farms is in the midst of it's 9th year growing food and community in Schenectady! This harvest season our farm gardens are flourishing, and we are busy harvesting and preserving the fruits of our labors. Our hard work, the plants, the bees and insect pollinators, and the soil together provided us with an abundance of strawberries, sugar snap peas, green beans, tomatoes, leeks, garlic, culinary herbs, and many more vegetables, fruits and flowers. We are looking forward to harvesting root crops and greens into the fall, as many crops get sweeter with frost.

We are thrilled with the new SiCM Community Kitchen! This year we dried culinary herbs and chile peppers to use in the kitchen. We canned tomatoes and made lacto-fermented sauerkraut with our cabbage. Fermentation is a food preservation process humans have used at least since Neolithic times to preserve food without cooking, make the food easier to digest and add distinctive flavors and textures. It's simple and inexpensive. Basically, by overgrowing a food with a specific type of good (for humans) bacteria, in the case of our sauerkraut, lactobacillus, harmful organisms, like fungi and molds, are unable to grow and the resulting food can be stored for a longer time and has health benefits. Creating our lacto-fermented sauerkraut required the addition of salt to the chopped vegetables; this is also sometimes known as pickling. We all have ancestral traditions around food and part of the joy of this work is the re-connection to those ancient practices and skills as a way to nourish and grow a vibrant, green and healthy community for all Beings.

Our farms also provided community greenspace, programming and food for Schenectady. We worked with the Schenectady School District offering a grow program where students learned agricultural skills working at Vale Farm.



Students and teachers harvested food and made a meal together. Schenectady youth had an opportunity to experience art and self-care from the garden at a weekly program in collaboration with CREATE Studios. Patrons stopping by Schenectady's Phyllis Bornt Library on State St can, twice weekly during the summer, pick up vegetables we provide for their Farm to Library food cart. And the library offered a summertime story hour at Vale Farm bringing many children and parents to visit.

Recently, our raspberry bushes at Fehr Farm were replanted as a walking Labyrinth, maybe the first ever Raspberry Labyrinth? Soon, if you visit, you'll see murals on our shed at Vale, a collaborative youth project with CREATE Studios. The work of (agri)culture in community is year-round and we anticipate a full and busy fall and winter.

-Melissa MacKinnon, Farms Manager

SCHENECTADY COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

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MEMBER FAITH COMMUNITIES

Alplaus UMC, Altamont Reformed,
Bellevue Reformed, Bethel AME,
Burnt Hills UMC, Christ Church
Episcopal, Church of St. Adalbert,
Congregation Agudat Achim,
Congregation Gates of Heaven,
Duryee Memorial AME Zion,
Eastern Parkway UMC,
Emmanuel Baptist—Friedens UCC,
Faith UMC, First Reformed, Sch'dy,
First Reformed, Scotia, First UMC,
Friendship Baptist, Good Shepherd
Lutheran, Holy Name of Jesus PNC,
Immaculate Conception,
Immanuel Lutheran, Lishakill
Reformed Church,
Lynnwood Reformed,
Parsons Memorial-COGIC,
Messiah Lutheran, Mt. Olivet
Missionary Baptist, Nemeton of the
Mother Grove, Niskayuna
Reformed, Our Lady of Grace,
Our Lady of Mount Carmel,
Our Lady Queen of Peace,
Our Redeemer Lutheran,
Prince of Peace Lutheran,
Refreshing Spring, Rotterdam
UMC, St. Anthony's, St. George's
Episcopal, St. Kateri Tekakwitha,
St. John of God Parish CACINA,
St. John the Evangelist, St. Joseph's,
Sch'dy, St. Joseph's, Scotia, St. Paul
the Apostle, St. Paul's Episcopal,
St. Stephen's Episcopal, Scotia
UMC, Society of Friends (Quakers),
State Street Presbyterian,
Tabernacle Baptist, Trinity Presbyterian,
Unitarian Universalist
Society of Schenectady,
Zion Lutheran



Dear Friends of SiCM,

Early in the summer, the Schenectady Urban Farms welcomed a litter of American Blue Rabbits. The @SiCMNY and @SchenectadyUrbanFarms social media presence was quite active with the pictures of 7 bunnies and following their growth. For many years, our farms have kept small animals. They serve a multitude of educational, agricultural, environmental, and social purposes. As livestock we currently care for chickens, rabbits, and honey bees – both domestic and wild. As wildlife, we seem to have a resident hawk in our Vale farm, wild rabbits in our Vale and Fehr Ave farms, and all manner of other usual urban suspects on our three sites, together being about two acres of urban farmland.

It has been profoundly interesting to learn about the depth, breadth and reach of our community farming operation. One of the most important learnings relate to the presence of these animals – livestock and wildlife alike. Cuniculture, apiculture, or poultry farming are not simply what we do.

Indeed, our farm members and volunteers learn about best practices and efficiencies of small livestock keeping in small and urban farming operations. What is more, the presence of this animals has been essential in our expanding of the paradigm of our operation as an intentional community farming endeavor.

The engagement many had with the new litter of bunnies early in the summer, the curiosity of many youth about our chickens, or the stories of mesmerizing experiences of seeing a new colony of bees follow a new queen and dividing into the wild is not only about the presence of animals, but about the relationships that are built with them. We take good care of them, and they take good care of us. It is the same with the plants we farm – we take good care of them, and they take good care of us. It is the same with the relationship we build with one another in employing the resources each one brings – I take good care of you and you take good care of me. It is not a transaction, where one gives something expecting something in return. It is about relationship, about this deeply embedded awareness that in doing my part for wellness for others will translate in wellness for me.

The work that we are able to facilitate for our community through the Schenectady Community Ministries – the largest pantry in Schenectady County, now close to 2 acres of urban farmland, the county-wide summer meals program for children and youth, and safe spaces for community hospitality and engagement – we do because for 50 years we have committed to relationship with the community: we work for wellness and justice for others in the unabashed hope that wellness and justice will reach me also.

I invite you to continue to support this work – yours and mine. We need your financial support – please, contribute at sicm.us/donate. We will appreciate your time and presence – please, inquire about volunteering opportunities at volunteer@sicm.us. We want you to share our stories – please, join and share our social media presence @SiCMNY. Let's work for justice and wellness for one and for all, unabashedly so, with and for Schenectady.

Peace!

Amaury Tañón-Santos, DMin
Executive Director/CEO

Georgia Davis is our AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and newest member of the SiCM family. VISTAs work to eradicate poverty by providing a year of service to a non-profit organization. Georgia is originally from Portland, CT and recently graduated from Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH with a degree in Political Science. She minored in Peace and Justice studies and intends to pursue a career in this field. She is interested in non-profit work and very excited to be joining us here at SiCM. While here, she will be working in many different aspects of our work, mainly concerning the new Community HUB.



LET US HELP. Know someone who could use help with groceries? Feeling overwhelmed? Everyone is welcome to SiCM's Food Pantry. Come to a safe space for groceries and to connect to support resources.



RISE & SHINE WITH SiCM SUMMER MEALS

Interns, staff, and volunteers delivered meals to children throughout the county.

Summer Meals 2021 began distribution on July 6th and ended September 3rd. Its impact on Schenectady County children and their families was wonderful. Once again, the program operated using the Grab-and-Go method due to COVID-19. The staff, interns, and volunteers served a total of 57,632 meals; breakfast and lunch. Meals were served at 32 sites, located in the City of Schenectady, Niskayuna, and Rotterdam neighborhoods. Five mobile units, with 'SiCM green shirted' staff, distributed meals from 8:30AM to 2:30PM.



The Summer Meals Program was able to operate from the new Community Hub at the SiCM Campus. Use of the community kitchen, community room, and the pole barn made for easy access to receive food from JR Proprietors. Once inside the hub, the food could be packaged, sorted into

coolers, and packed into vans much easier. Having the support (and often extra hands) of the SiCM staff was terrific!

The success of this program is certainly due to the hard work of all of staff along with many volunteers. Due to COVID, we limited the number of volunteers at each site. Thanks to the local congregations, police and fire departments, service clubs, community agencies, organizations, and individual volunteers because we were able to serve so many youth and their families. This program is not possible without the volunteer hours. Due to state regulations we were also able to distribute extra meals to our families on Fridays. These meals were so important for families to bridge the gap of few if any weekend food distributions.

The Summer Meals Program is funded through NYS Education Department, United Way of the Greater Capital District, City of Schenectady, The Schenectady Foundation, and private donations. COVID guidelines of masks, gloves, and meticulous cleaning procedures were followed throughout the program. Books were distributed to children with lunches through the generous donations from volunteers, the Schenectady Public Library's Stars Program, the Open Door Bookstore, and Trinity Presbyterian Church in Scotia.. Summer Meals 2022 may have a different look, but SiCM will be ready to serve our community. Again, thank you to all of our volunteers, interns, congregations and local community organizations that allowed us to feed the children in Schenectady County.

-Jo-Anne Rafalik, Deputy Director/COO



GIVE WITH A PURPOSE

SUPPORT SiCM BY HOSTING A FOCUSED DRIVE



Did you know that many of our food pantry guests ask for important necessities like spices, cleaning products, feminine hygiene supplies, and even adult diapers? These items are not purchasable with WIC and other supplemental services. Hosting a focused drive means we can support our guests and our families better. Consider hosting a focused drive through your business or faith group today!

Contact Tom Schofield, Pantry Manager.
toms@sicm.us 518-346-4445 x 2



FALLING INTO PLACE

SiCM hosted the 2nd Annual Free Fall Farmer's Festival on Sunday, September 19th! Free fresh produce was distributed to our guests and grown by local farmers. Our goal is to connect our neighbors and the residents of our community to

the farmers who produce delicious fruits and vegetables around the area.

Thank you to Schenectady Urban Farms, Gade Farm, Indian Ladder Farm, Schoharie Valley Farm, Hudson Harvest, and our many community partners that helped make the day a special event for our guests like C.R.E.A.T.E. Community Studios, SCAP, New Choices Recovery, and SafeInc.



THANK YOU to participants of this years CROP Hunger Walk! With your support, we raised over \$40,000 for aid across the world and our local community.



LET US HELP. Food Justice means everyone deserves access to healthy, local food. Without the worry of how quality food gets on the table, the ability to solve other problems can grow. Join our team. Volunteer your time. Make a meaningful contribution. Visit sicm.us/donate today.



The Last Word by William Monaghan, President of SiCM

"Adversity does not build character, it reveals it." -James Lane Allen, novelist

One of the many, many quotes that my father used to say that still resonates with me. Throughout its 50+ years, SiCM, its staff and volunteers have stood strong for the people of Schenectady, revealing true "Character" and "Strength" without a hiccup or delay in services and meeting needs.

This summer we faced some challenges:

- The continued construction of our expanded and renovated campus on Albany Street.
- The transition to new executive leadership, including a shift in our staffing and board structures
- Deploying the county-wide Summer Meals program still under pandemic regulations

We are blessed...

- by the ways we are living into our interfaith identity, including the welcoming of Congregation Agudat Achim and the Nemeton of the Mother Grove to our membership and activities
- by the expanded and upgraded space in our campus for service of and to the community
- by the reorganizing of our steering committee to include sub-committees in the areas of relations, social justice, and finance.

Through all of these incidents, SiCM - its staff, member faith communities, and volunteers – not only stepped up to the challenge but in almost every single one of these we found ways significantly changed the way we do things for the better.

As board president, I follow the foot steps of a series of important and almost seamless transitions: in executive leadership from Rev Phil, to Jo-Anne, to Amaury. In board leadership from Peter Carmen, to Rachel Curtis to myself. When approached to stand for a position on the Executive Committee I was very reluctant. The esteemed group of people that held these positions were selfless and knew how to get things done. Mighty big shoes to fill, a daunting task.

The more I learn about SiCM's rich past and exemplary service the more I am amazed at the forward thinking and progressive ideas that Rev Phil put into place leading us to where we find ourselves today. Amaury's energy and clear vision, combined with our new interfaith relationships, and calling to address social justice issues, are important to our ability to articulate and provide to Schenectady's needs, and being a stronger united voice of our community.

My priorities as president are to learn as much as I can and to guide the Steering Committee and SiCM in its work and governance. I need all the help and input I can get. I also want to share personal action items:

1. To be more present at the food pantry
2. Continue to participate in the Social Justice Committee especially with an eye on Voter Registration and Political participation and recognition.

What are your personal action items in relationship to SiCM? Buckle up and get ready! New and exciting things are happening at SiCM and I am grateful to be a part of it.