



*Office of the Department of Human Services
LEADING BOLDLY, WORKING TOGETHER*

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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GROUND BROKEN FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS **HEALTHY COMMUNITY PROJECT KICKS OFF**

Rockford, IL – April 5, 2010 - Mayor Morrissey gathered with grant recipients and community volunteers to turn over the soil at one of forty Community Gardens today. These neighborhood vegetable gardens are part of a larger initiative, **The Healthy Community Project**, which will focus on access to fresh, nutritious food, increased physical fitness, neighborhood revitalization and beautification, and storm water management.

Mayor Morrissey indicated that “the Healthy Community Project is an exciting expansion of the previous Community Gardens project. We’ve created healthy collaborations that will enable us to assist neighborhoods in creating forty community vegetable gardens in 2010, an over 572% increase from 2009.”

“The community vegetable gardens will decrease food stamp usage while providing access to fresh, nutritious food, especially for low income families and youth”, stated Jennifer Jaeger, Community Services Director for City of Rockford Human Services.

Vegetables from the neighborhood gardens will go first to the neighborhoods involved. Each garden will also participate in the Plant-A-Row for the Hungry which produced more than 18 tons of food for area food pantries last year. Jeff White, Master Gardener with the University of Illinois Extension-Winnebago, explained that the Extension and master gardeners will assist through education and technical assistance, which should help to reach the goal for this year of 20 tons for food for area pantries. Some gardens hope to be able to take their produce to sell at local Farmer’s Markets as well, with profits to go towards neighborhood group sustainability.

The Healthy Community Project, a four-fold effort, via the Community Vegetable Gardens, includes:

- **Healthy Habits** works to combat the short and long term effects of poor nutrition, and limited access to healthy food, especially felt by minorities and children in

our community. The Community Gardens will promote physical fitness while creating access to fresh, locally grown food.

- **Healthy Collaborations** provide the resources to make gardening possible, including education and assistance from the University of Illinois Extension – Winnebago and Boone Counties, Master Gardeners, City of Rockford Human Services and Public Works Departments, state and federal funding (Community Services Block Grant – ARRA, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity), local businesses, and the Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District.
- **Healthy Neighborhoods** are where and how the action happens. Neighborhood Network is bringing together area neighborhoods organizations, hundreds of volunteers and other partners. Community Vegetable Garden locations are being created by neighborhood groups in such diverse locations as neighborhood plots, two elementary schools, a senior facility, land donated by faith based organizations, and residential facilities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Healthy neighborhoods are created by the neighborhood organizations and the individuals that make change happen. Neighborhood Gardens create a focus for working together for change, with the benefit of locally grown, nutritious food, a bit of exercise, and lots of camaraderie.
- **Healthy Habitats** are being created through the Community Gardens Project. Neglected or underused property will be turned into carefully tended community vegetable gardens. The City of Rockford will be providing rain barrels to the city gardens to lower water costs and capture runoff.

The Healthy Community Project is partially funded by Community Services Block Grant – ARRA and Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

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