

Taking the first step in the 'food desert' dilemma

This material is provided by the Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood Association.

WITH THE RECENT closure of Double 8 grocery stores in inner city neighborhoods including Mapleton-Fall Creek, the issue of food access in Indianapolis has moved into the spotlight. Led by Urban Patch Director Joyce Moore, the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood has formed a food access advisory group to help solve these food issues and hopes to immediately implement a program known as Oas1\$, the Dollar Store Project, as one short-term solution to the problem.

The idea for Oas1\$ grew out of Urban Patch, a local organization that works to develop stronger urban communities. On its blog, Urban Patch classifies the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood as a "food desert" - an area without easy access to healthy, affordable food. Although three "dollar stores" exist within a one-block radius of Mapleton-Fall Creek, as a result of the Double 8 franchise closure the area no longer has a single grocery store. According to the food access advisory group, there are many long-term solutions to this problem.

Unfortunately, the neighborhood needs solutions now. The Oas1\$ project seeks to more immediately address the current need for food availability.

The first action item for Oas1\$ is distributing the book *Good and Cheap* by Leanne Brown, which promotes eating well on a food stamp budget. Brown creates meals that cost only \$4 per day for people on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Despite the book being available online, Moore worries that often the people who

need the book the most either can't afford to buy it or can't download it from the website because they don't have consistent internet access. Her goal is to raise money to buy this book and distribute to churches, food banks and other areas where food access is limited. It's important that people are able to cook healthy meals from food that's close by their neighborhood.

In addition to *Good and Cheap*, part of the Oas1\$ project includes having food demonstrations, modeled after the book, to teach people how to cook with limited supplies and ingredients.

Moore said *Good and Cheap* will serve as a "food Bible" for nutritious, healthy, affordable food that's accessible. "I don't have to re-invent the wheel if it's already there," she said.

Moore plans to use the book as a guide for the cooking classes. She hopes that neighborhood churches will distribute the book and class information to those who use church food pantry services. Because churches are good for building strong communities, they will hopefully be able to circulate information most effectively.

The final component of Oas1\$ involves dollar stores carrying healthier options. Moore has already talked with the dollar stores on 38th Street and reported that their responses were all positive. Moore hopes to implement vegetable carts in the lots of the dollar stores, similar to the way stores distribute food in New York City. The carts would have fresh produce year-round for neighbors to buy.

At the first Mapleton-Fall Creek Food Access meeting, Matthew Easley, a farmer from Rushville, spoke about food use amongst farmers. Typically, farmers will plow 60% of their garden crops under

because that's all they can either sell or use themselves. Moore hopes eventually to partner with several local farmers, including Easley, to take advantage of these unused crops so that the neighborhood can sell fresh produce in food carts at an affordable price and avoid wasting so much food.

Moore is excited that people are passionate about the food issue she has been talking about for a long time. As a life resident of Mapleton-Fall Creek, she remembers walking to the A&P on 34th and Illinois street, or to the Little Butch and Kroger on 38th and College Avenue. "I feel like I can get this project done now because people are interested," she said. Moore believes that once people understand the issue more, they will get involved and can have an even bigger impact than Urban Patch can by itself.

Neighbors can help with Oas1\$ by purchasing and distributing copies of *Good and Cheap* and talking to churches, pantries and other places where books could be useful. There will be a fund-raising site for the books on ioby.org, which has helped fund-raise for several previous Urban Patch projects. Moore Her goal is to get information in the hands of the people by obtaining 5,000 copies of the book.

Residents can also help Moore with the cooking demonstrations and promoting the concepts of food carts. Moore hopes that solving the food issues will have a ripple effect: If there are more food opportunities, there will be more jobs; if people are outside getting food, there will be less crime. Overall, Mapleton-Fall Creek will be a better neighborhood.

In the long run, Moore and others in the food access advisory group would like to see a small store come into the Double 8

building or a food cooperative like Pogue's Run, which currently has a grocery on E. 10th Street. However, she is also realistic about what can come into the neighborhood and what can stay. "No big store is coming here," she said. "If they were, they'd already be here. We have to do this grassroots. We need something convenient, accessible and sustainable," she continued. "Nothing is mutually exclusive. We aren't doing this or this, but this and this."

Those interested in joining the neighborhood advisory group around the food issue can contact Moore at Joyce@urbanpatch.org. More information about Oas1\$ is also available at urbanpatch.org under "Projects."

NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

The next NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING will be from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 10, at Phillips Temple CME Church. Neighborhood meetings take place every second Thursday of the month at the same time and location. Neighborhood meetings are a way to get to know neighbors, community organizers, and City representatives. They are also a great opportunity to learn about Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood Association initiatives and get involved.

The Mapleton-Fall Creek BOOK CLUB will meet at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 5 at the College Avenue Branch Library to discuss *Orphan Train* by Christina Baker Kline. Updated information about the book club is available at www.mfcna.org.

The next Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood Association URBAN 4-H