

Winter 2014

## Sprout! Regional Food Hub

When a strategically located church property went up for sale one block off Main St., the Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation (NEDCO) of Springfield, Oregon knew it had found a home for Sprout!, its long-discussed food hub project. “After our executive director went to look at the site, she came back and said ‘this is where we are going to have a year-round farmers market and commissary kitchen,’ ” explains NEDCO’s Assistant Director, Sarai Johnson.



The Sprout! year-round indoor farmers market held every Friday in Springfield, Oregon.



The Sprout! regional food hub, formerly First Christian Church, operates as a farmers market, professional kitchen, and events center.

With investment funds from local foundations and the City of Springfield, NEDCO purchased the historic 1947 building in December 2011. The existing congregation, which could no longer afford needed maintenance on the aging structure, was able to relocate to a more suitable property nearby. Local architects remodeled the church while contractors provided in-kind donations with major discounts on electrical work and kitchen equipment.

“The architecture firm did an amazing job of maintaining the historic character of the church while at the same time

building an ultra modern kitchen. I believe it's the largest kitchen of its type in the area. It's quite beautiful," adds Johnson.



Jars of Red Duck ketchup being prepared at the Sprout! professional kitchen facility.

The completed Sprout! facility now provides multiple services—a year-round indoor Friday farmers market with over 40 vendors, and a licensed professional kitchen area allowing entrepreneurs to prepare packaged food products and teach cooking classes. The attractively restored building is also a popular location for corporate and networking events, as well as weddings. “We’ve had 21 events take place since July with more scheduled, which is very exciting,” Johnson says.

Sprout! is also in the process of developing its own branded line of food products to be sold in local convenience stores. Beginning in June, the non-profit will offer healthy meal kits that can be cooked quickly at home, such as chopped vegetables with noodles for a quick stir-fry or fresh soup. The program aims to hire low-income Springfield residents who will prepare the food in the Sprout! kitchen space. “We want our food products to help people change habits and stimulate our very local economy,” says Johnson.

RCIF invested \$200,000 in Sprout! that goes towards working capital and building improvements.

## Solar Energy Loan Fund

Imagine living in Florida’s sweltering summer climate and not being able to afford the basic need of air conditioning. Many of the state’s low to moderate-income residents, including the elderly and disabled, face this type of hardship because they cannot pay the high upfront cost of energy-efficient products and alternative energy. Fortunately, a creative new nonprofit organization, the Solar Energy Loan Fund (SELF), aims to provide underserved communities access to financing in order to implement cost-effective home energy retrofits.

“We are breaking down barriers for working class people,” explains SELF Executive Director, Doug Coward. “Not only can they take advantage of energy savings, but also capture lucrative tax credits and rebates that were previously only available to the wealthy.” Launched in 2010 in St. Lucie County with a \$2.94 million grant from the Department of Energy, today SELF enjoys independent status as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) and has goals to grow its loan portfolio to \$10

million by 2017. SELF currently operates in five counties and plans to expand this year into the major metropolitan area of Orlando. “We’ve received calls from the mayor’s office in Chicago and the governor’s office in Nevada asking if SELF could help develop a comparable program in their jurisdictions,” says Coward. “Our model can be applied anywhere in America.”



RCIF-funded SELF client, Willieetta Broadneax (center), with SELF CFO Duanne Andradre (left), and SELF Executive Director, Doug Coward.



RCIF-funded SELF clients, Emma and Robert Velez (center and right of center), with Julian Nazario (left of center), SELF Regional Program Manager, and contractors from Sea Coast.

environmental, economic, and social benefits,” says Duanne Andrade, SELF Chief Financial Officer. “The improvements increase not only the use of

SELF clients have reduced their energy consumption on average by 23 percent. The organization’s financing process includes an initial assessment of a client’s home to identify the most cost-effective energy solutions. The client is then educated about the best types of products to invest in, such as a solar water heater, and provided with a list of approved contractors to solicit competitive bids. Ultimately, the client chooses which products to purchase and contractors to work with. “Our model creates a triple-bottom line impact that produces

clean energy, but also the number of jobs, home equity, and the quality of peoples lives.”

RCIF invested \$150,000 in SELF.

## RCIF Welcomes Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters



The leadership team of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters (OLVM) (from left): Sr. Ginger Downey, general secretary; Sr. Judith Turnock, vice-president; Sr. Beatrice Hains, president; Sr. Leora Linnenkugel, general treasurer.

RCIF welcomes Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters (OLVM) as a new investment partner. The congregation, founded in 1922 by Father Joseph Sigstein, makes it home on the Victory Noll campus in Huntington, Indiana. OLVM actively invests in many alternative/socially responsible funds and recently made the decision to add RCIF to its portfolio. “We want to support the collaboration among Religious Communities,” says Sr. Leora Linnenkugel, OLVM general treasurer. “This is a high priority for us and RCIF is the

only fund we know of that is doing just that.”

As a uniquely non-institutional ministry, OLVM focuses on serving the poor through its centers located in five states. “Many of our sisters are active in our centers that meet the needs of immigrant populations,” explains Sr. Leora.

Near the Mexican border in El Centro, California, for example, OLVM runs the Evelyn Mourey Center. Opened in 1991, the center offers multiple services that include emergency food assistance, ESL instruction, and computer classes. “We help people get established and become better citizens in the area,” Sr. Leora explains. “We might direct them to the local health clinic, help them file paperwork, and even go to court to act as interpreters.”

In the West Town area of Chicago, OLVM also runs the Julia Center, which provides education and enrichment programs primarily for women and girls. Sewing classes are available thanks to donated machines and materials,

and children enjoy Mexican folk dance classes that keep them connected to their cultural heritage.

The center also works with local police who train new immigrants on how to watch out for gang members, or how to be part of the recently implemented Illinois program allowing undocumented workers to qualify for driver's licenses. "We provide ways that allow immigrants to be more viable community members," adds Sr. Leora. "Many of our sisters our bilingual and thats a plus in fulfilling our mission."



An OLVM sister with community members at the Julia Center, located in the Chicago area, where services and classes are available to immigrants.



The Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel on the Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters (OLVM) campus in Huntington, Indiana.