



CHAMPION

August 2024

Generosity Grows Among Our UMFS Garden



Dig into our
Student-Led Food
Forest Inside!



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Unwavering champions
for children and families.



Dear Friends,

I am thrilled to share with you our Summer Champion Newsletter! After a brief hiatus, we are back to share the incredible stories of growth and resilience that our children, teens, and families experience at UMFS.

As we embark on our 125th anniversary in just a few months, UMFS has made a renewed commitment to the health and wellness of those on our campus and beyond. The construction of our new hydroponic greenhouse in partnership with Feed More will begin any day now and we are planning a revitalization of our recreational facilities to better serve children and teens today.

In this edition, you will learn about another one of those efforts: our Charterhouse School Food Forest. It has been a joy to watch the students nurture their plants – not to mention enjoy the fruits of their labor!

I hope you enjoy learning about the Food Forest I and look forward to seeing you soon!

Warmly,

N. Toscano

Nancy Toscano, PhD, LCSW
President + CEO



Cultivating Generosity and Growth

If you visit the UMFS campus on any weekday morning in recent months, you'll find students all around the grounds, carrying hoses and watering cans, diligently caring for rows of herbs, vegetables, vines, and berry bushes despite the intense summer heat.

These students are part of the UMFS Charterhouse School Gardening Club and are tending to the Food Forest on campus – UMFS' new initiative meant to empower students to try new things and give them a sense of ownership and generosity.

A Food Forest is the use of food-producing plants in the landscape that combines fruit and nut trees, berry bushes, vegetables, herbs, and edible flowers, along with ornamental plants into aesthetically pleasing designs.

As a student-led project, Charterhouse students were engaged from the beginning in planting and harvesting the edible landscape, and decided what types of plants, bushes and trees they wanted to grow. The food forest is teaching students at UMFS about generosity by giving them the opportunity to share their abundant harvest with their families, friends, staff and volunteers.

Dozens of UMFS volunteers, including board members, donors, and community partners such as Anthem and Trinity Episcopal School, have worked alongside the students for the last few months to plant and maintain the Food Forest.

Gardening offers many benefits beyond just beautifying outdoor spaces. By encouraging a deeper connection with nature and strengthening social and communal bonds, it can provide a therapeutic escape from stress and reduces anxiety. It also encourages the children to get outside and move their bodies.

Chase's Green Thumb Journey at UMFS

For Chase, a student at UMFS Charterhouse School, gardening provides all of this and more. Getting his hands dirty isn't new for 11-year-old Chase, who learned to plant squash, zucchini and watermelon with his grandparents before enrolling in Charterhouse. But his passion for tending to the plants every day and the relaxing routine they provide is what he's found comforting since coming to UMFS.

"I really love the Food Forest and like watering the plants every day," Chase said. "I like planting strawberries, tomatoes and watermelon especially."

He feels a special bond to the plants, fruits and vegetables that he tends to.

"To me, plants are like people."

"My favorite part of gardening is focusing on plant life and making sure they can grow and seeing how it happens," Chase said. "To me, plants are like people. They grow like people. They need nutrients, like us. We also need water, sun and food."

Chase has learned that gardening can be tough work. "I think the hardest thing about gardening is trying to keep track and making sure they have enough water." Chase and his peers get to enjoy their dedication by eating the berries, vegetables and herbs that they watched grow and flourish.

"I feel proud that we've planted it and that it was able to survive and it's ready to eat," Chase said about their harvests.

The food forest has also taught them about new and interesting foods. Chase found a new love for fresh dill, honeysuckle, and arugula, or what Chase nicknamed 'spicy lettuce.'



Working alongside his classmates in the food forest not only gives Chase the opportunity to strengthen his horticultural skills, but also allows him to start each day refreshed.

"It's a great way for them to get a break from everything going on," says Patrick Gill, Charterhouse School teacher and Gardening Club advisor. "Chase finds the process of watering and caring for the plants very relaxing. It's also a consistent thing in his life, he knows the plant will be there every morning for him. It's the first thing we do each morning, and it's a really great way for them to start their day."

The Charterhouse School Gardening Club began with only a handful of students, it now has a growing waitlist of students who have seen the positivity gardening has brought to their peers and are excited to get involved. The students know that the plants they sow today will outlive their time at UMFS and will continue to bring joy and nourishment to others for years to come. ●



Berry Good Times

"We're planning on having a cookout at the end of the summer," said Patrick, "Chase is really excited about the different things we can do with produce from the garden. We'll definitely be adding dill to a few different things." Thanks to our Generosity Collective partners at Fit4Kids, Chase and the other students got the opportunity to try local blackberries. They added them to a salad of fresh arugula and lettuces harvested from their Food Forest garden!

Hungry for more?

Scan the QR code to learn more about how you can support the Food Forest project at UMFS

