



For Immediate Release

‘Farming for the Future’

DC teams up with residents, FullCircle26, Inc., to bring hydroponics to Amani

MILWAUKEE, March 2, 2022 — If you walk past the Dominican Center (DC) at 24th and Locust in the heart of the Amani neighborhood, you will see something you could never expect. A warm red glow radiates from the basement windows. Inside is DC’s hydroponics lab and what hits you first are the smells of spring and walls of glistening green produce.

“There is power in building self-sustainable communities,” said DC Executive Director Maricha Harris. “Not only can urban agriculture and agriculture technology (AgTech) be leveraged to create access to fresh produce in our communities, but it can also be leveraged to create jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities. I’m excited about the ways we can use hydroponics to develop an ecosystem that focuses on the intersections of food, education, vocational training and financial sustainability.”

DC’s hydroponics lab supports the Amani Revitalization Plan’s concentration areas of Education and Family Well-Being and Housing and Economic Development. Wes Landry, DC’s hydroponics expert has worked with Amani residents building the lab from the ground up. He refers to the plants as his “babies” and strives to learn everything he can about urban agriculture. Before the pandemic, DC’s hydroponics lab was producing enough produce to share with residents and friends, and enough to sell to a chef who used fresh basil in his local restaurants. “Last year, because DC’s Bloom & Groom plant giveaway was canceled due to a pandemic flower shortage, we grew marigolds and other flowers to hand out as gifts to Amani residents,” Landry said. “We also grew basil, dried it and ground it up. We gave that away to residents as a holiday gift.”

This year, Landry has been working on a growing schedule and has tested and harvested crops of bok choy, several types of lettuces and basil. He has plans to develop systems to grow healthy leafy greens next, in addition to flowers and any other crop that the Amani residents are interested in. “If anyone has ideas let me know, I’ll try it,” he said.

To bring urban agriculture and hydroponics to Amani, DC turned to an expert in the industry, FullCircle26, Inc. (FC26I). “FullCircle26, Inc., is a valuable partner in this work,” said Harris. “They are experts in agriculture and agriculture technology, and their passion for helping communities of color is palpable.”

FC26I is a full service North American sales and distribution organization of AgTech and STEM/STEAM products. The company is committed to providing access to new plant growing technologies, learning tools and training for all ages. FC26I is also launching a non-profit organization called Next Generation Harvest, with a mission to provide greater access for generational change. FC26I is led by Founder and CEO Shelley Mathews. “Hydroponics is a way to grow fresh produce year-round and offers all the essentials for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) training for youth, teens and adults,” said Mathews. “The Dominican Center has been on the forefront of community-based plant growing through hydroponics and can be a leader in AgTech for the future.”

Mathews fosters a solid relationship with DC and the building that houses the organization. “I was led back to my childhood school (St. Leo’s was formerly housed in the building) ... as a solution to the challenges of urban farming and the accessibility to fresh produce in 2019,” she said. “When I first met with the DC and Amani United team, a young man said, ‘People wonder why there is so much craziness in 53206 ... it’s from our children being raised with lead in their systems (from non-removal of lead pipes) and no access to fresh produce.’ He saw hydroponics as a solution and his statements confirmed my mission, purpose and the dedication of our FullCircle26, Inc., team’s efforts,” Mathews said.

In 2021, DC achieved FC26I’s first 3D Model of Sustainability™ Award for growing plants for STEM education, food sustainability and enterprise. Despite the enormous achievement, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DC’s

hydroponics lab had to shut down temporarily. “During this time of shutdown, the FC26I team provided virtual trainings to schools and clients. Seeing the outstanding results of these programs and needing a location for FC26I’s Hydroponics Science and You Lab, DC was the perfect host partner,” said Mathews. “We hope to reboot and strengthen DC’s hydroponic lab with other AgTech tools, STEM educational and vocation training, giving access to farming for the future. ... The Center could be the ‘Wakanda’ of AgTech and STEM/STEAM educational and vocational training for the Amani residents, Milwaukee schools and a model for other non-profits striving for a successful social enterprise tool.”

About the Dominican Center

Dominican Center is located at 2470 W. Locust Street, in the Amani neighborhood. It works with Amani residents and partners to build a better future. Dominican Center serves as the community anchor for the White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, Building Neighborhood Capacity Program and is the lead community partner for the US Department of Justice’s Innovations of Community Based Crime Reduction grant for Amani.

Please contact Christina Chronister at the Dominican Center for additional information at (414) 444-9930 or by email at christina@dominican-center.org

About FullCircle26 Inc. (FC26I)

The team at FC26I delivers professional sales representation, consulting, program development and distribution of Farm and STEM products from a Milwaukee, Wis., distribution center for North America. We assist small companies in gaining access to international distributors and customized markets. FC26I CEO Shelley Mathews is available for speaking engagements, workshops, lectures and conferences.

More information is available at <https://fullcircle26inc.com>

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