July 19, 2014

Farmers Market encourages healthy eating

By Jaime Williams

One farmers market is bringing fresh food and nutritional services to an under-served neighborhood in the Bronx.

The Heights Community Farmers Market, run by BronxWorks, opened for the season on Thursday, July 10.

BronxWorks, which provides food, shelter and support to Bronxites in need, started the farmers market in 2012 as part of its healthy eating campaign with a group of seniors from the BronxWorks Heights Neighborhood Senior Center.

The initial goal of the market was to affect community change through food while empowering seniors, said BronxWorks Coordinator of Health Initiatives Kimberly Wong, and to increase access to healthy food in an under-served area.

“We bring local, fresh produce to a low income neighborhood,” she said.

The market accepts food stamps and vouchers, and has information available about the programs. In order to further serve the community, BronxWorks purchases extra food from the market to distribute at
their senior centers, said John Weeds, assistant director at Bronx Works.

This year, the Heights Community Farmers market received a $10,000 grant from the FreshConnect initiative to enhance services at the farmers market.

That includes hiring an outreach and education specialist to encourage the community to shop at the market through cooking demonstrations, farmers market tours and educational workshops.

“We’ve been able to build in other services that attract people,” said Weeds. “We try and make it as lively as possible.”

There are also free health screenings that take place every other week starting July 10, including testing blood pressure and sugar levels, said Wong. Nutritional education is provided by Cornell University Cooperative Extension, which for the opening week instructed people how to properly wash their fruits and vegetables.

But the weekly cooking demonstrations, complete with healthy recipes using produce, are the most fun part of the market.

It’s important to show people that the vegetables can taste good, and that there are a wide variety of ways to prepare them, said Barbara Bailey, a Just Foods Community Chef who got involved through the senior center.

“If you can cook it, let them taste it, and it’s good,” she said, “then they’ll be more likely to take it home and cook it.”

On the menu this week was a stir-fry of black-eyed peas and seasonal greens.

Bailey, who calls herself a foodie, is on a mission to show people that eating healthy is the way to go.

“I’m trying to change my health and get people on board in the same way,” she said.

The Heights Community Farmers Market is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Thursday from July 10 to November 13, at University Avenue and 181st Street.

Reach Reporter Jaime Williams at (718) 742–3383. E-mail her at jwilliams@cnglocal.com.

©2014 COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER GROUP