



COMMUNITY PARTNER STORY

NaWaYee Center School's Garden Project Receives Prestigious Awards

By Sheila Regan

The Indigenous Garden Project, run by South Minneapolis's Na-wa-yee Center School (NCS) has garnered lots of attention recently. The garden, started three years ago, is part of NCS's mission to create experiential learning experiences, particularly in the outdoors. This year, the garden project received two prestigious awards: the National Gardening Association 2010 Youth Garden Grant, and the Minnesota State Horticulture Society State Award.

The two awards bring attention to the garden, which has been growing in support from students, teachers, and the surrounding community since its inception.

The National Gardening Association, a nonprofit leader in plant-based education, awarded grants to 100 youth gardening projects this year. In a letter to Na-wa-yee, the NGA commended Na-wa-yee for its high level of commitment to youth gardening. "The combination of clearly stated goals, curricular connections, and careful planning that you included in your application exemplifies a well-planned program that is likely to be well-maintained and sustainable." The school received a \$500 gift card to Home Depot as part of their award.

NCS provides culturally specific education to Native American youth. The school started as a drop-in center in the 1970s and became an accredited high school in 1981. Its mission is to provide "transformative education grounded in indigenous life-ways and love of learning," according to its website. The tag line for the school states that it inspires "a sense of place and direction, within the Circle of Life, which students discover strength, purpose, and vision."

In an interview, Principal Joe Rice said that the school values hands-on learning, particularly in the outdoors. The school participates in numerous field trips to other community gardens and environmental preservation sites throughout the year. Students help with the garden both during the school year and in the summer.

There has been positive attention from neighbors and local businesses as for the garden, particularly since the addition of the four winds mural that overlooks the garden, painted by the students. To encourage community outreach, students share their harvest with families and other community members.

(To see the garden in full-bloom, swing by the school on 2421 Bloomington Ave.)