Notes from the Field
Promoting community food security: Saving fruit by preserving local sources of produce
By Nick CastroLang

The mission of the Spokane Edible Tree Project is to empower our neighbors to share in the harvest and care of existing fruit and nut trees by implementing food recovery methods and cultivating a connection with the greater needs in the community.

The Spokane Edible Tree Project was founded in 2013 by Kate Burke a one-time Harvest against Hunger VISTA with Second Harvest in Spokane.

When I asked how she came up with the idea for Spokane Edible Tree Project she said, “I was attending a gleaning conference in Portland and I just had all these questions and thought we can do so much more. I spent 2 hours peppering the workshop leaders with questions.” It was during this conference that she realized that more needed to be done outside of just hosting gleans because there was still a lot of food waste.

She had heard of the Portland Fruit Tree Project and decided to approach them about starting a similar organization in Spokane. “I know Spokane is a great community and that something like this would be successful. I also knew that if I could use the tools and resources that the Portland Fruit Tree Project had that I did not need to start from scratch.”

Once she spoke with the Portland Fruit Tree Project and they provided her the necessary resources she started with a group of 12 people. Eight of them were the core group of leaders and they went to work on starting the organization. It took two years for Spokane Edible Tree Project to get its official 501c3 nonprofit status. Once that was established, it was time to build the organization. Through her past experience as a VISTA at Second Harvest she was aware of the time and effort it takes to organize gleans.

She approached Rotary First Harvest about placing a Harvest Against Hunger VISTA with Spokane Edible Tree Project. This VISTA which is funded through Spokane Edible Tree Project and WSU extension provides the capacity to expand the way the organization runs. Having a VISTA to take on the day to day tasks of planning gleans, volunteer recruitment and capacity building for the organization is a huge help says Kate.

Partnerships have been key in helping to get Spokane Edible Tree Project off the ground. Another great partnership emerged from her work with Second Harvest. Kate was able to approach them about the idea of getting larger gleans from orchards out to those that need it most. A partnership that Second Harvest had established...
with the Greenbluff cooperative of farms in Mead Washington was a great opening for Spokane Edible Tree Project. The Spokane Edible Tree Project became the gleaning organization for getting large amounts of produce into the emergency food system in Spokane. Second Harvest has also been able to provide Spokane Edible Tree Project with a large distribution partner and also provide storage for large gleans. The newest and most interesting project is the use of a Harvest Node that Catholic Charities Spokane Food for All Program, built this year. The Harvest Node is a storage container that is used as cooler space for produce before it is donated or distributed to a food bank that can use it. When doing smaller, more urban gleans the produce collected by Spokane Edible Tree Project and donated to Catholic Charities is able to be stored in this mobile storage unit until Catholic Charities is able to deliver the produce out to organizations that need it. The unit is centrally located, easier to access and does not require a large warehouse or trucking.

When I asked Kate about where she saw the organization in the long term she replied that she would like to see more harvest leaders in the communities. A harvest leader is someone who is the main volunteer for a specific neighborhood. Spokane Edible Tree Project provides volunteers and the harvest leader does all the recruitment and coordinates the gleans in their neighborhood. They take initiative and get people motivated to glean fresh fruit and save that fruit for those that most need it.

For more information about the Spokane Edible Tree Project, visit their website: http://www.spokaneedibletreeproject.org/

*If you are in the Spokane Area and are interested in receiving produce from a glean please email Spokane Edible Tree Project.

For more information about starting or developing your farm-to-food bank initiative, please email growingconnections@northwestharvest.org, or contact Laura Titzer at 206.923.7423