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Green City Growers breaks ground for Cleveland greenhouse

Business in Central neighborhood is latest from Evergreen Cooperatives

CLEVELAND (Oct. 17, 2011) – Green City Growers today will welcome community members, partners, and supporters to Cleveland’s Central neighborhood to break ground for its commercial greenhouse. Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson, Cleveland Foundation Chief Executive Officer Ronn Richard, and Cleveland Councilwoman Phyllis Cleveland are among dignitaries scheduled to be on hand as shovels turn the soil.

When completed in the spring of 2012, the greenhouse will produce 3 million heads of red leaf, green leaf and Boston (Bibb) lettuce and 300,000 pounds of herbs each year. Produce will be sold to grocery stores, institutions, distributors, and consumers, who will have the option of buying locally rather than purchasing produce shipped from California or elsewhere. Plants will grow hydroponically, in shallow pools of nutrient-rich water rather than in soil.

Green City Growers is the newest company from Evergreen Cooperatives, a network of worker-owned businesses that includes Evergreen Cooperative Laundry and Ohio Cooperative Solar. Evergreen companies contribute a portion of profits to a development fund that seeds new businesses.

As a worker-owned cooperative, Green City Growers hires from surrounding neighborhoods. Worker-owners share in the company profits, sit on the company’s board, and participate in decisions, including hiring and business strategy.

Mary Donnell, CEO of Green City Growers, said community support helped make the project a reality. The greenhouse will be located on 10 acres on the corner of Kinsman Road and Ensign Avenue.

“Despite a tough economy nationwide, I found civic, corporate, and philanthropic partners willing to support a strong business model that yields fresh, locally grown produce and a terrific opportunity for workers,” Donnell said.

"We feel very welcomed by the people of the Central neighborhood. We look forward to a wonderful partnership with the community."

Richard of the Cleveland Foundation said Evergreen businesses show that Cleveland companies will purchase locally when given the opportunity.

"Institutions such as Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Clinic, and University Hospitals increasingly 'buy local' rather than from out of state," Richard said. "By keeping purchasing power in the neighborhoods, these institutions are helping to strengthen Cleveland's neighborhoods."

Keith Parkham, Evergreen Cooperatives' first hire at Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, said employee ownership transforms the jobs into careers. Evergreen workers are involved in strategic business decisions.

"When I come to work every day, I know I am building something – for my family and for the community," Parkham said. "Evergreen has changed my life."

Green City Growers will begin hiring in the spring of 2012 for crop managers, customer service representatives, harvesting and packaging personnel, production supervisors, truck drivers, and quality assurance technicians, all from Cleveland neighborhoods. For information on employment or produce availability, call 216-268-0200.

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