# 2012 Annual Awards Program

## Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

## Deadline for Nominations: March 16, 2012

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

### SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category *(select only one)*:

Community Health and Safety

x Community Partnership

Community Sustainability

Strategic Leadership and Governance

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name of program being nominated: | Unity Park Community Gardens | | |
| Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: | City of Lenoir, North Carolina | | |
| Jurisdiction population(s): | 18,261 | | |
| Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2011, to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.) | | | |
| Month: | January | Year: | 2010 |
| Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, October 2012. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.): | | | |
| Name: | W. Lane Bailey | | |
| Title: | City Manager | Jurisdiction: | City of Lenoir |
| Name: |  | | |
| Title: |  | Jurisdiction: |  |
| Name: |  | | |
| Title: |  | Jurisdiction: |  |

### SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name of contact: | Patricia Kaye Reynolds | | |
| Title: | Communications and Resource Director | Jurisdiction: | City of Lenoir |
| Street address: | 801 West Avenue NW | | |
| City: | Lenoir | State/Province: | NC |
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**Narrative**

**Problem Assessment and Challenge**

After a loss of 8,000 manufacturing jobs within a period of five years, almost every one of Lenoir, North Carolina’s 6,100 households felt the impact of living in a community faced with economic, social, and cultural challenges. The abandoned Singer furniture factory site on College Avenue symbolized the city’s sense of loss and need for a new community identity. Within three-quarters of a mile of the Singer site, the following conditions existed: 1) Two elementary schools had an average of over sixty percent of their children on free or reduced lunch. 2) The Lenoir Soup Kitchen, Yokefellow, and Helping Hands Clinic were attempting to serve increased numbers of residents with declining budgets, and 3) Caldwell Memorial Hospital attempted to serve a community whose health outcomes were among the poorest in North Carolina.

As the community struggled to rebuild its economic base while addressing the increased demands for medical service for the uninsured and greater demands on social service agencies, a unique partnership, Caldwell Community Gardens was forged in 2010. The Caldwell Community Gardens partnership consists of the City of Lenoir, Caldwell Memorial Hospital, Caldwell County Master Gardeners, and a coalition of faith-based organizations and local residents with a passion for gardening and food security issues.

**Program Implementation and Costs**

Caldwell Community Gardens partnership has transformed the former Singer furniture factory site into the home of Unity Park and Community Gardens, featuring 75 raised garden beds, an irrigation system, fruit orchard, berry patch, garden tool shed, walking path, and children’s play area. Work began on the site in July of 2010, after the City of Lenoir received a two year FIT Community grant from the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund for $60,000. Using matching funds and in-kind contributions from the City of Lenoir, Caldwell Memorial Hospital, and private donations to the Caldwell Memorial Hospital Foundation for community gardens, Unity Park was constructed. The City of Lenoir provided leadership by committing to provide the land, water supply, and staff time to administer grant funds, clear and grade the land, and construct the garden shed. Caldwell Memorial Hospital provided staff time for participation in the partnership, free health screenings to entice people to sign up for garden beds, and a unique duo “Two Men and a Stove,” (consisting of a vice-president from administration and a physician) who presented demonstrations of cooking with fresh produce and herbs that were filmed for distribution on the local public access television programming.

**Tangible Results**  
 Gardeners in the partnership helped created a Gardens Operation Committee that established operational policies for the gardens, recruited gardeners to assist people who were new to gardening, and solicited support and resources for the gardens.

Through the efforts of the partnership, volunteers were recruited from the Google server farm in Lenoir to construct the first twenty-five raised garden beds at the park. Other volunteers planted a plot of land in the park with potatoes, corn, turnips, lettuces and other greens—all foods that were distributed to local social service agencies such as the Lenoir Soup Kitchen, Caldwell Shelter Home, and Yokefellow.

In order to make the park as sustainable as possible, the partnership sought assistance from cooperative extension in acquiring and installing water collection cisterns to utilize rainwater for watering the orchard and berry patches. The city’s Building and Maintenance division travelled to the state Arboretum in Asheville to study the garden shed there. Using plans modeled after the Arboretum shed, employees built the shed at Unity Park, incorporating solar energy.

In February of 2012, fifty additional garden beds were constructed by volunteers from the city, the hospital, and citizens. In March of 2012, regional television stations WBTV-Charlotte and WSOC-Charlotte covered the planting of 150 dwarf apple and pear trees in the orchard at Unity Park. Reporters covering the event had both been at the Singer site in 2009 when a major fire at the old furniture factory threatened nearby businesses and homes. In their broadcasts the reporters commented on “the remarkable transformation” and the “renewed community pride” evident at Unity Park. The WSOC broadcast included an interview with a gentleman who was eating lunch at the Lenoir Soup Kitchen who commented on the meal he was having that included turnips harvested from Unity Park gardens, “This is a really good thing for the people of Lenoir.”

**Lessons Learned**

The success of the Caldwell Community Gardens partnership in developing Unity Park Community Gardens illustrates key principles of leadership. The partnership brought together organizations who were all challenged to address conditions brought about by economic and social change in their community, but every condition could not be addressed at one time by the partnership with the resources that were available. The partnership learned the importance of narrowing its work plan to objectives that were more strategic at various stages of development. For example, one broad goal had been to measure health outcomes of people who were gardening at Unity Park. The partnership made a wise decision to focus on building the park, developing operational strategies, and recruiting gardeners during the first years of operation. Recruiting and tracking health outcomes will become much more manageable once those objectives are fully realized.

Another valuable lesson was the importance of communication among the members of the partnership. The partnership meets at least once a month to share information about Unity Park, but also to share information and ideas about what the various members of the partnership are doing. As a result, communication and trust among partners has been strengthened.

Unity Park and Community Gardens will have a dedication ceremony to mark the implementation of its first phase in May of 2012. The partnership of the City of Lenoir, Caldwell Memorial Hospital, and Caldwell Community Gardens can take pride in its success in broadening equitable access to fresh garden produce to the citizens of Lenoir. In addition, the partnership continues to increase public awareness of the importance of healthy diets and physical activity to the community’s health outcomes.