



# New York Nonprofit Press

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serving people who serve people

## Yonkers Mayor & Council Honor Leake & Watts Youth Gardeners

On October 9, Leake & Watts and the Food Bank for Westchester welcomed Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano, City Council President Chuck Lesnick, and City Councilmembers Wilson Terrero and Michael Sabatino to the Leake & Watts Yonkers Youth Garden in celebration of this year's fall harvest. In partnership with the Food Bank for Westchester, food grown at Leake & Watts is distributed to thousands of children and families in need throughout Westchester County. Mayor Spano presented awards to the teens at the Leake & Watts Residential Treatment Center, recognizing their achievements in the Youth Gardening and Employment Readiness Program.

Mayor Spano and the City Councilmembers recognized the teens whose efforts throughout the spring and summer have made this year's harvest another tremendous success. The Mayor and the Councilmen then joined Master Gardener Doug Decandia from the Food Bank and the Leake & Watts Youth Gardeners in touring the garden and harvesting some of the late fall crops.

For the past two years, the Leake & Watts/Food Bank for Westchester Youth Gardens have provided approximately 8,000-10,000 1-cup servings of food for nearly 1,500 food insecure families across Westchester County each year. This year, our Youth Gardeners have continued to increase their efforts and have produced 12,000 servings of food. No less important, the Youth Gardens give at-risk youth at Leake & Watts the opportunity to learn important employment readiness skills and experience the value of community service.

"It is exciting to see our students take ownership of the garden and witness the pride that they feel as they see the literal fruits of their efforts when they harvest all the watermelons, tomatoes and other vegetables from the garden," says Alan Mucatel, Executive Director. "Most of the kids we serve are all too accustomed to being on the receiving end of community service. It is an extremely empowering and important experience for them to be able to give back and make such a



Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano, Yonkers City Council President Chuck Lesnick, and Yonkers City Councilmembers Wilson Terrero and Michael Sabatino came to the Leake & Watts campus yesterday to honor several of the agency's Youth Gardeners.

positive impact on their local community."

Serving teens with cognitive and learning disabilities, behavioral and mental health challenges, histories of abuse and neglect, and/or involvement with the foster care system. The Leake & Watts Residential Treatment Center provides academic, emotional and social support to help teens achieve academic success, graduate from high school and move forward toward post-secondary education and a career. The Yonkers Youth Garden, part of the Employment Readiness Program, plays an important role in helping teens gain the education and experience necessary to be successful in the workforce, as well as providing teens with hands-on nutrition education and community service opportunities.

While Mayor Spano and the City Councilmen acknowledged the most recent achievements of the Youth Gardeners at the October 9th Harvest Awards Ceremony, the success of the Youth Gardens has previously been recognized by New York State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins and the Yonkers Green Policy Task Force at the 2011 Greenie Awards, and by the Food Bank for Westchester, who presented our Youth Gardeners with the Hunger Heroes Service Provider Award in June 2013.