

FOOD FORESTRY

Project Food Forest grows the food it provides for an unconventional approach to cultivation

By Abigail Hayes
Wake Early College of Health and Sciences,
Raleigh, N.C.

Kimberly Rockman encourages everyone to participate in a food forestry initiative: “When (people) recognize that power within themselves, that they are changemakers, that they are capable of living intentionally and learning and failing and being forgiven, that’s it. That’s where it goes.”

Rockman, president and executive director of Project Food Forest, said food forestry takes an unconventional approach to cultivation. The organization was launched in 2016 in the southwestern Minnesota town of Luverne and serves neighboring communities throughout Minnesota, South Dakota and Iowa.

“We focus primarily on perennial plants, which just means they come back year after year,” Rockman said. According to Project Food Forest’s website, “a food forest ... is a diverse planting of edible plants that attempts to mimic the ecosystems and patterns found in nature.”

The cultivation done by the organization parallels the many layers of a rainforest, according to Rockman. This type of plant harvesting can meet the needs of the community in ways you “don’t normally see with agriculture,” according to Rockman.

Project Food Forest does much more than try to fulfill the nutritional needs of the community. Rockman said, “(It) offers a way to connect people ... across sectors, across ages, across cultures.”

Rockman has had a passion for helping people since she was 17. When she was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome in her college days, it made her question how much of what she was dealing with could be attributed to her environment. Both of these things led her to Project Food Forest.

“I really started to have an interest in sustainability and another recognition of my impact on the planet,” Rockman said. “(My illness) led me down the continued path of, ‘OK, something is wrong with my body, but how does that connect with things that are going on in the environment?’”

Not only did she find herself committed



COURTESY OF DIANA HENSLEY

Prairie Ally Outdoor Center, a Project Food Forest host site in Luverne, Minn

to exploring her environment, she later realized the people around her were not necessarily gifted with the opportunity to do the same.

Having grown up in a small town and moving into metro areas, she said she noticed a lot of people “didn’t necessarily have a connection to nature or know where their food came from.”

With her love for nature coupled with the resolve to bridge the gap between people and the environment, she knew Project Food Forest could turn her dreams into

action — especially with the help of partnering organizations.

A “beautiful opportunity” came into fruition with the help of the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. Its contribution allowed Project Food Forest to extend helping hands to other regions.

Partnering organizations, such as Prairie Ally and A Healthier Southwest, work alongside the community to encompass the core values Rockman adheres to within Project Food Forest.

“We’ve partnered with organizations that do a variety of things; it could be for social equity or health equity,” Rockman said. “They provide physical activity, nutrition from the food that’s grown there, mental health benefits of overall enhanced well-being.”

Through Project Food Forest, willing volunteers and community members, Rockman can watch a fruitful harvest yield both edible landscapes, and a haven for all to come together in unity with each other and with nature.

Jules Porter paves the way for equity in video games

By Faaya Adem
The FAIR School,
Downtown Campus



Jules Porter

Jules Porter’s grandparents have been two of her biggest influences. Her grandfather always told her, “Anything man can conceive, you can achieve.”

Maybe she hasn’t done everything man can conceive, but she’s getting there.

After earning degrees in aeronautics and theology, she joined the Marine Corps. She became a sergeant in two years, an accomplishment that usually takes four to five years. She earned her J.D./MBA from the University of St. Thomas before starting her own video game development studio.

Before earning her advanced degrees, Porter watched a TED Talks lecture by Dr. Artika Tyner, who is now a clinical professor and director at the Center on Race, Leadership and Social Justice at the University of St. Thomas School of Law. Tyner said the law is the language of power. That stuck with Porter, so she went to St. Thomas to learn that language. That wasn’t her only reason. Since she was a kid, her grandmother wanted her to become a lawyer. The deaths of Trayvon Martin, who was killed in Sanford, Florida, in 2012, and her grandmother within a year pushed her to take that step. Porter felt she wasn’t doing enough for her community where people were losing family members and not getting justice.

“My brother was a Yale graduate who liked to wear hoodies, but people aren’t going to ask him, ‘Hey, sir, are you a Yale graduate? Are you a Republican or Democrat?’ before they act on their racist inclinations or before a police officer assumes something and kills him,” she said.

hopes to provide a gameplay experience where everyone can see a character who looks like them.

“What I’m hoping is that my video game company will be powerful,” Porter said. “I think media is a powerful force in order to develop that message and build empathy.”

In an industry dominated by white men, only 3% of video game developers are Black. And only 1% of programmers and coders are Black. On top of that, roughly 25% of people in the industry are women.

In Minnesota, she wants to educate and provide opportunities for people of color and Indigenous people who are interested in working in the video game industry. By educating one generation, it creates a cycle in which each generation has an established video game community with mentors to learn from, according to Porter.

“An entry-level video game programmer makes anywhere between \$72,000 and \$80,000 a year,” Porter said. “So, by teaching kids the skills to make video games, and some of the multiple disciplines that go into that, sets them up for an entry-level job that dramatically changes their economic outlook and their ability to engage in the global economy.”

Growing up, Porter was also always interested in coding. She first learned HTML to customize her MySpace and Black Planet profile. Later in the Marine Corps, she started to learn C++ to partition off a part of her personal computer and gain a small amount of privacy.

“Every part of what I learned was because I was just curious. I wanted to do something better,” she said. “I wanted to learn how to do it myself, and I don’t want to pay anybody to do it.”

Porter soon realized her coding skills could be turned into something bigger.

That’s when she decided to create Seraph 7 Studio, the first console video game development company in the world owned by a Black woman.

When she was younger, Porter didn’t have many Black female superheroes to look up to. Instead, she had to look to real-life heroes like Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Bessie Coleman.

The goal of Porter’s company is to create positive images so girls and kids of color can see themselves as heroes in their games. With her playable demo coming out at the end of the month, Porter

Delinquency and diatribes: Graffiti art is an outlet in turbulent times

By Sehar Chowdhry
Sanskriti School,
New Delhi, India

The clamorous clanks of a spray-paint canister at late hours in the night may sound like vandalism; but to artists and protesters, they sound like change.

According to Lisa Waldner, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas, graffiti art is often used as a form of protest and resistance, often aimed toward the dominant culture. As a result, it has often been viewed as a crime rather than an act of political mobilization. Waldner, an award-winning sociologist and researcher, said she was enthralled by the sentiments hidden behind this art form.

She said although graffiti in her neighborhood is a newly discovered outlet for the supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement, the art has been an avenue for political dissent since it rose to prominence in the United States during the Chicano movement in the 1960s.

Despite being an act of vandalism, some street art is aimed at bringing attention to the plight of certain social groups or to raise awareness of pressing political and social concerns.

For many years, graffiti has been the scandalous and politically aggressive product

of mysterious artists veiled by the looming shadows of multihued murals. Sociologists have tended to focus on more socially acceptable political expression; protests haven’t been as tolerable and have been viewed as acting outside of the accepted public discourse. Graffiti as an extension of the protest message has been equated with crime and gang violence, which has negative connotations that undermine the art’s political implication.

“People can choose to channel their anger into destructive riots, which can be pretty legitimate, but artists use their sentiments to educate — that’s what makes graffiti so special,” said Waldner.

Graffiti accentuates turmoil; it’s often a cry for attention, and the creators will claim public property with their creations just to receive it, she said.

In popular movements, there is a lack of order in which opinions are voiced — that is the whole point. Graffiti is the art of the people and often reflects the movement’s lack of linear progression. Graffiti can either be seen as a last-ditch effort, or it can be the highlight of the protesters’ agitation.

“In the whole aftermath of George Floyd’s lamentable passing, graffiti murals are being preserved in their original locations to commemorate artists’ contribu-

tions to the movement. Art in itself may not bring about tangible change, but it is a monumental component of every movement and should be regarded with the respect that is owed to it,” Waldner said. “Nothing in itself can bring about change except the collective need and subsequent mobilization for it.”

However, preservation of street art is often associated with mounting it on museum walls, which Waldner said is inherently incorrect. Removing graffiti from the streets and buildings to preserve it in museums negates the art’s meaning. Graffiti in museums is available only for privileged people; street art that was originally accessible to the masses is now being capitalized rather than politicized. This simple action is detrimental to the graffiti artist community as a whole.

“I agree with artists who are angered by exploitation of their work by museums,” said Waldner. “The Berlin Wall is one of the immensely acknowledged murals made by angered East Germans who weren’t allowed access to the rest of the country, from whom the art has been purloined and shipped globally, causing it to lose meaning. Taking art out of context can be damaging, especially when the art is profiting the robber rather than the artist.”

ThreeSixty Journalism

ThreeSixty Journalism is leading the way in developing multicultural storytellers in the media arts industry. The program is a loudspeaker for unheard voices, where highly motivated high school students discover the power of voice and develop their own within ThreeSixty’s immersive college success programming. Launched in 1971 as an Urban Journalism Workshop chapter, since 2001 the program has been part of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas. To learn more about ThreeSixty Journalism, visit threesixty.stthomas.edu.



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College of Arts and Sciences

It's just the beginning for MIGIZI

Fire reduces Native American organization's building to rubble

By Allison Brodin
Mounds View High School

As protests swept through a south Minneapolis neighborhood, flames and destruction found their way to the home of Native American nonprofit MIGIZI. The organization's 2-year-old building was reduced to rubble. The fire was a setback but not a roadblock for the orga-

nization. Binesikwe Means, lead media instructor at MIGIZI, said the community came together for a healing event after the fire. She said, "We did everything to be able to find a place of healing for our community and then we went back into moving mode. We have to continue. MIGIZI is so much more than a building. Although our building went down, it doesn't mean as an organization that we were going to stop serving our youth, so we came together." The nonprofit was founded in 1974 and incorporated in 1977. It started as a journalism program to teach Native

American people how to tell their own stories in the media. At the time of its founding, mainstream media was overwhelmingly made up of white men. Since then, MIGIZI has branched out to cover more topics than journalism. It has also shifted its focus to empowering Native American youth in its community. MIGIZI uses programs such as Green Jobs Pathway, where students learn about solar power and other sources of green energy. This program teaches students through hands-on experience in the form of projects that eventually work to better the community.

Some examples of these projects are the creation of small free libraries and food pantries outfitted with solar panels, which community members can use to charge their phones. Projects like this are designed to better the community. Another program MIGIZI provides is First Person Productions, which gives a voice to underrepresented stories and people. Like Green Jobs Pathway, this program also teaches students skills through real-life projects and community help. Students need to learn these skills because "a lot of times the communities that are underrepresented are not

necessarily always the place people go to when they want to hear a voice, so we really look at empowering our youth and giving them the opportunity to tell their own stories from their own perspective," Means said. In 2019, MIGIZI bought and remodeled a building to house its programming. According to Means, the building was remodeled by a Native American architect, and the students had a big say in the design. The students chose a lot of the colors of the walls and the types of floors. They also described what types of studios and spaces they'd like to see for specific programs.

During the recent riots and protests in Minneapolis, the new building was burnt down. Despite people coming to the building to protect it from the outside, fire spread from neighboring buildings. MIGIZI is now operating out of the American Indian OIC and the American Indian Center, both in Minneapolis, until this summer's programming is over. In the fall, the nonprofit will be moving into a temporary space. It will rely on donations to help rebuild. The best way to donate and support MIGIZI is through its website or the "Save MIGIZI" GoFundMe campaign at www.gofundme.com/f/save-migizi.

Nutritious and culturally specific



COURTESY OF ERIC WILSON

Volunteers from City Church pack 1,300 lbs of harina de maiz (yellow corn flour), for partners at Community Emergency Service. Harina de maiz is a staple for making many culturally connected foods like tamales, pupusas, arepas, and tortillas.

By Gwynnevang Vang
Tartan High School

Food is a source of energy we need in order to get through our day. People have been more in need of food since the pandemic started compared with the past few years. "Food connects us all. It can help bring people together as a community," said Emily Eddy White, development and marketing director for The Food Group. "There's a really huge need for food, and for quality of food, and community support is really making that happen," she said. "So people are giving their time and support. And people being aware, too, and wanting to do something about it." The Food Group is a nonprofit focused on providing nutritious and culturally specific foods for those experiencing food insecurity. One way this food is gathered is by being rescued and harvested from farmers' markets and

farms. The Food Group also partners with food shelves and meal programs to provide healthy and nutritious items to people in need. "And it's healthy food, too. It's not just any food; it's the foods that people are familiar with; it's the foods that they need and that's going to help their bodies grow as well, because there's a huge intersection between health and hunger," White said. The core values of The Food Group are nutrition and equity, which is why workers, organizers and volunteers focus on providing culturally specific foods that are familiar and fit different cultural dietary needs. Imagine a traditional, ethnic meal your family makes: how it smells and tastes, what it looks like, how it made you feel and why you enjoyed it. Without specific ingredients, that meal would not have been made. There is a wide variety of foods that cross cultural lines and are easily accessible for people to purchase.

"I think we still have a consistent response, but we're in need of volunteers right now, so that's definitely one of the things that we're trying to focus on," White said. Because of the pandemic, it is especially hard to safely provide food in a large community area. The Food Group has taken this situation seriously by working hard to continue distributing food to people in need. They've had volunteers come in groups of 10, instead of the usual 50, which brings the efficiency level down as the need for food goes up. Whether the food is delivered or distributed, The Food Group needs volunteers to give them a helping hand. "We definitely have a whole plan for how you communicate to your supporters to keep them engaged, and to let them know about the impact that they're having as supporters and in the community, and (to tell them about) the work that's happening," White said. Getting food to people is just as

important as putting the food in safe packages. The Food Group uses its website, newsletters, news spots, events, social media, and its blog to communicate what it is and what it does to help those facing food inequality — like its Fare For All and Twin Cities Mobile Market programs, which make nutritious foods more affordable and accessible through food distribution in the community. "It's the foundation for people to be able to thrive and focus on other areas of life," White said. "I think a lot about how is it that we have community members that don't have the food that they need and how do we make sure that everyone has that." This pandemic presents many challenges, but The Food Group is committed to providing food through support in donations and volunteering so everyone gets the food they need. Check out volunteer opportunities at thefoodgroup-mn.org/get-involved/volunteer.

Artists create place to reflect after killing of George Floyd

By Annie Swanstrom
Maple Grove Senior High School

Ever since Cadex Herrera picked up a pencil, he has been creating art: from doodling to creating murals to bring awareness to social justice issues in his community. Herrera is one of the lead artists who created the George Floyd Mural at the George Floyd Memorial, at East 38th Street and Chicago Avenue in Minneapolis, created May 28. This mural has gained immense popularity globally and is arguably one of the most recognized imag-

es recently relating to the Black Lives Matter movement. Herrera was one of three artists who painted the mural. The other artists are Minneapolis-based Greta McLain and Xena Goldman. Before painting the mural, Herrera had been speaking up for Black Lives Matter and protesting. He had been attending protests for two days when Goldman contacted him and asked if he wanted to paint a mural with her; he accepted. "She asked me to design it, as she already had an idea for the

portrait. I came up with the concept," Herrera said. A huge amount of thought went into each detail in this mural, and Herrera said his focus was the mural's symbolism. He chose to use bright colors to bring a hopeful and positive light to the lives taken by law enforcement officers. Floyd is surrounded by a sunflower, which Herrera said stands for longevity and loyalty. The names in the sunflower represent the seeds that weren't able to grow. He included them so the community would also remember

the other victims of police brutality around America. Herrera created the mural to create a community. Art is a tool to help a community heal and foster a sense of belonging at uncertain times, he said. Herrera uses art to overcome hard times throughout his life and wants the mural to also be a focal point for healing. "This mural gave the community a place to reflect, a place to stop and a place to think," he said. Not only did the finished mural help build a communi-

ty, it was literally painted by community members. "People were walking on the street saying, 'What can I do to help?' And we said, 'Join in. Grab a brush and go ahead and put your mark on there so we're all involved,'" Herrera said. Herrera said he was "shocked at how fast it became part of the symbol of the movement." To Herrera, this was an "act of rebellion," which allows one to express anger and grief. For him, art is a visual language more powerful and more immediate than words.

The goal of the George Floyd mural is to give the community a safe space to heal and be together. Herrera's specialty of creating art around social justice and bringing an awareness to the injustices we see today has affected people globally. "When talking about social statements and political statements, especially in murals and art, the job of that piece is to move the viewer to have them emotionally react to it," Herrera said. "And then also through that reaction, create change."

University of St. Thomas



The Urban Art Mapping Team enjoying a rare face-to-face meeting.

COURTESY HEATHER SHIREY

Professors work to preserve urban art

By Ava Barnett
Central High School

University of St. Thomas associate professor Heather Shirey is aware most of her students walk into her art history class thinking it's all about ancient Roman sculptures and Michelangelo; but through the Urban Art Mapping Research Project, she wants her students "to see that art is all around us, and it's a form of communication we're all participating in."

Since 2018, Shirey, associate English professor Todd Lawrence and associate history and geography professor Paul Lorah have worked alongside a team of St. Thomas students to create online databases of street and protest art.

Originally, they were documenting only the murals in St. Paul's Midway neighborhood. But in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic and George Floyd's killing, they have expanded their efforts.

Their largest and fastest-growing database is the one dedicated to Floyd and anti-racist street art. Most of the images that make up this database are contributed by the public.

"Not everybody who's submitting art thinks about art in the same way that we

do," Lawrence said. "Sometimes the images they take are not the way we would have taken them."

The impermanence of street art is one of the reasons it is so important to document.

"What is true of low street art is that it's ephemeral; it's not going to last forever," Lawrence said.

It evolves quickly; there can be several different pieces of art in the same location at different times, he said.

Shirey added, "You can look at an address like 301 Hennepin, and you can see that there was some graffiti that went up early on. And then you can see it later on some other panels painted in that location."

Through the database, these changes are recorded.

The members of the Urban Art Mapping Research team have high hopes for what the database will be used for. They want it to be used as both a research and an educational tool.

Lawrence said he wants researchers to "look back and really have a more comprehensive understanding of what happened in terms of artistic expression that's connected to the uprising in the movement."

While these databases have great potential to teach future generations about the reactions communities had to Floyd's death and the following uprising, it also has the power to connect them to that history. Through the Urban Art Mapping Research Project, they have the ability to see how the artists' reactions evolved, see the changes in the art as they happened. It will give them the opportunity to think about the events that have happened in a deeper fashion than just a single picture of a mural would.

Lawrence said even today, as these events are still playing out, he is "thinking about George Floyd every day. I'm thinking about the uprising every day. I'm thinking about people's pain and anger and everything that goes along with that every day."

ThreeSixty scholar gives voice to untold stories

By Anjali Thomas
Shakopee High School

Armando Tecpile has a hard labor job at a dairy farm near Cochrane, Wis.; but that's a significant issue for his wife, his children and his life in general, because it is 1,800 miles from home.

Born and raised in Vera Cruz, Mexico, Tecpile sometimes works 60 hours a week and sends \$300 to \$500 home every other week to ensure his dream of building a house for his family comes true.

However, his wife, Lourdes Ramos, told Tecpile, "I'm not asking you for anything. I'm not asking you for money. We don't need such a big house if it's just two of us and the boys."

"I miss my papa. I love him a lot," said Aaron Tecpile, Armando Tecpile's son.

Armando Tecpile's story is just one of the many stories of Mexican immigrant workers who have sacrificed their home, their family and their culture to seek better opportunities. According to Under-Told Stories' reporting, half of U.S. dairy workers are immigrants from Latin America, and Armando Tecpile's employer says he couldn't hire enough locals to do the job.

Tecpile's story is summarized here based on the one told by the Under-Told Stories project, an



Simeon Lancaster, left, works in the field at Under-Told Stories and sees his stories air nationally on PBS News.

COURTESY OF UNDER-TOLD STORIES

international journalism outlet reporting stories not often featured in mainstream media outlets. It focuses on the consequences of poverty and addresses the work of ordinary and extraordinary people.

Under-Told Stories was created by "PBS NewsHour" correspondent Fred de Sam Lazaro in 2006. This unique, three-staff project partners with the University of St. Thomas and "PBS NewsHour."

Simeon Lancaster, Under-Told Stories associate producer, editor and 2013 ThreeSixty scholar, said, "These stories give (students) a more global perspective and an empathetic view of the rest of the world in their early days of education."

When Americans think about news reports regarding the rest of the world, they often think of stories regarding suffering and death. Frequently, the bigger the

number of deaths, the bigger the headline.

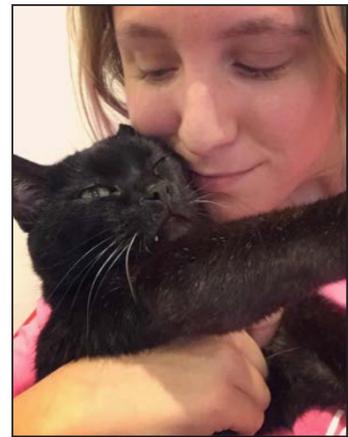
However, at Under-Told Stories, the team travels to less developed countries, such as India, Morocco, and the Latin America region, to seek attention-grabbing narratives of ordinary and extraordinary people to humanize critical global issues.

"Climate change, that's a big topic, and it's most likely going to go over people's heads, and go in one ear and out the other," Lancaster said. "But if you tell a story about a farmer in India whose crops have failed, whose neighbors have committed suicide because the rains aren't coming because the summers are a lot longer, that all of a sudden is a lot more relatable for people."

The project seeks to touch the lives of many through the power of words. At Under-Told Stories, every connection is developed through personal narratives.

Not only do they bring awareness to relevant global issues, Lancaster said, they also generate solution-oriented narratives that restore "empathy to a world that despite being so connected, is still divided, and it also offers a path forward instead of just dwelling on the bad."

If you are interested in reading more stories like Armando Tecpile's, go to www.undertold-stories.org.



COURTESY OF KAT CURTIS

You can find Kat Curtis and her cat, Uno, on TikTok.

How a TikTok creator uses her platform for comedy, social change

Curtis documented herself getting tested for COVID-19 (twice)

By Siri Pattison
St. Paul Academy

Kat Curtis' more than 1.5 million TikTok followers are certainly familiar with her weird food combos (most recently Ramen and Sour Patch Kids), her one-eared cat, Uno, and her often repeated phrase, "It's underfilled!"

What started out as a made-up word used to describe the lack of product in chip bags soon became Curtis' catchphrase, and she began to apply the word to more serious issues, such as the treatment of people with disabilities.

"The way people treat disabled people is underfilled," Curtis said in a TikTok conversation with her friend Toby, who has cerebral palsy. The two discussed the unfair stigmas faced by people with disabilities and Toby's feelings regarding the issue.

For Curtis, making people laugh has always been a passion. She started her career in journalism, then quickly shifted into digital media. When TikTok first appeared on her radar, she saw an opportunity to further pursue comedy.

TikTok's main demographic is Gen Z — defined as people born between 1995 and 2010. According to Statista, 37% of the app's United States users are between ages 10 and 19. Curtis' most responsive audience skews even younger.

"The ones that are literally trying to call me on Snapchat right now are like 9 to 12," Curtis remarked.

Recently, Curtis has been creating more serious TikTok videos about the circumstances affecting her audience. For example, she documented herself getting tested for COVID-19 (twice). She wanted to destigmatize the process.

"I didn't want people to be scared," she said.

Curtis also attended Black Lives Matter protests in her Los Angeles neighborhood.

"It's the right thing to do. It's documenting history," she said about posting footage from the protests in the wake of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis police custody. She also posted a video with a piece of paper taped to her wall that said, "The way we treat Black people is underfilled," the same text that is currently in her TikTok bio.

Curtis said she finds content creation fulfilling, but she also feels the weight of responsibility that accompanies such a large platform.

"You feel like a viral junkie," she said. "And I think you have to fight that and remember the reason you're there in the first place."

Using humor and accessible language such as "underfilled," Curtis has been able to present serious information in a way that is easily digestible to her young fans, as well as her usual funny and funky content.

"I know I provide something that doesn't scare 9-year-olds but can also be informative," she said. "I have the flexibility to give a gentler voice."

Curtis' Instagram stories are filled with animated renditions of her created by fans. Archived videos show her enthusiastically meeting grinning supporters, shouting at the camera, "These people are not underfilled!"

It's clear she has a passion and knack for creating content that spreads positivity and joy to a younger generation.

You can follow Curtis on TikTok and Instagram at [@thekatcurtis](https://www.tiktok.com/@thekatcurtis).