

COMMON TIES THAT BIND

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Going Green



Brahm Ahmadi, co-founder of the People's Grocery, works to provide quality food to Oakland's inner city residents.

Fifty-three liquor stores and 17 fast-food restaurants crowd the inner city streets of Oakland, Calif. But the People's Grocery is working to reverse the cycle of poor nutritional standards – one resident at a time.

At the forefront of a food movement to grow and use local produce in this country, the People's Grocery is proving that "homegrown" is vital in more ways than one.

Spearheading this initiative is Co-founder and Executive Director, Brahm Ahmadi. With a background in worker-owned businesses and a passion for organizing economic democracy, Ahmadi is suited to tackle inner city woes while addressing critical public health issues. "The number one cause of death in West Oakland is not violence, but heart disease," Ahmadi says. This is one community statistic he hopes to change.

The People's Grocery helps residents of all ages regenerate their lives through healthier diets. Xan West, the new community outreach coordinator at People's Grocery, recalls what it was like growing up in nearby East Oakland when boredom was a major factor. With the initiation of the community gardens, however, West Oakland teens can now get involved in learning horticulture and enjoying the harvest. "When a young person puts a seed in the ground and sees it turn into food, it is a source of pride," West says. "In doing this, they feel good about themselves."

The staff, whose job is to galvanize the community, understands that food is universal, and therefore is a vital medium for promoting relationships between people. This grass roots group is sparking new vitality in the community through its focus on delivering quality food to locals.

By offering communal space to enjoy conversation at cooking classes and community celebrations called "grub" parties, the program provides catalysts for its own success.



These once-a-month events are an enjoyable mix of good food, nutrition and cooking information, plus entertainment provided by local musicians and artists.

The town now has five urban gardens that provide access to locally grown organic food. The Grocery also has teamed up with City Slicker Farms, another local nonprofit, to assist residents of West Oakland in planting their own backyard gardens.

"There is so much here," West says. "People of color have a lot of desire to apply their agricultural knowledge and improve their lives."

This nonprofit grocer is literally getting to the root of some urban

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