SPOTLIGHT on Sustainablility

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The Fresh Stop Bus battles food deserts, poor nutrition and disease

'The Fresh Stop Bus is a calling card and brands our place in the community.'

Roniece Weaver, MS, RD, LD Hebni Nutrition Consultants, Inc.

What is the Fresh Stop Mobile Market Program?

Thousands of people living in Orlando don't have easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables. We call these areas food deserts. Many live with food insecurities; they are forced to make poor nutritional choices based on costs. The ***Fresh Stop Mobile Market Program*** strives to tackle both these problems by bringing fresh produce to the people. The program teaches the importance of good nutrition aimed at fighting diabetes, heart disease, obesity and hypertension; something that is difficult for people without access to fresh, nutritious foods.

What was the spark that initiated the program?

Ms. Roniece Weaver, a founding partner of Hebni Nutrition Consultants, Inc., was inspired to start the ***Fresh Stop Mobile Market Program*** after seeing a program in Chicago, IL, called ***Fresh Moves***. With her other Hebni partners, Fabiola Gaines and Ellareetha Carson, Ms. Weaver convinced former LYNX CEO John Lewis to donate a retired bus and give life to the ***Fresh Stop Bus***. Orange County, the City of Orlando and Florida Hospital were some of the other partners and believers in the program, donating funds to refurbish the bus and get it out in the community.

"We couldn't do it without the collaboration of our many partners and the support of our County Commissioners," Ms. Weaver said. "And we thank them all!"

How is the Fresh Stop Bus changing people's lives?

The bus sources fresh produce and takes it into the community. As people 'pick' the produce available on the bus that day, they are given taste tests, recipe cards and cooking demonstrations. Introducing fresh produce in any format, like spinach in a smoothie or squash in a sauce, can make a difference in someone's health. The bus accepts food stamps, keeps the prices low and re-invests the income to keep the cycle going. Additionally, the bus gets produce from Second Harvest Food Bank and distributes it free to students at schools in designated food deserts.

"We are getting ahead of the curve and solving food problems in our community," Ms. Weaver explained. "But we need more sources of local produce to help keep the costs down. We need more farming in Central Florida."

How can you help?

Volunteers are always needed to help load fresh produce onto the bus. Plus, there is a great need for commercially licensed bus drivers. Check out **http://www.thefreshstopbus.com/** for the many ways to sign up and ***get on the Bus!***

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For more information on Orange County's Sustainability Initiative, visit www.ochomeforlife.net