

HUNTINGDON ADULT EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

Horticulture students reaching outside classroom

The Horticulture class at the Huntingdon Adult Education and Community Centre has been busy growing a variety of lettuce plants that will be used by the students of both the Academic and SFIS programs participating in the Behind the Counter Cafe meal preparation program.

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Teacher Denise Chavez instructed her seven students on the art of cutting lettuce and recognizing when it is ready to be eaten before setting them to work with scissors and several bins for collecting the cuttings.

Afterward, the roots and soil used for the lettuce plants will be composted and eventually used for planting bulbs.

The lettuce project, while complying with the course, is also part of a wider plan to bring the program and its students out into the community. "I really want to start getting out of the school," says Chavez, admitting she was motivated by recent news of the New Frontiers School Board partnering with Salaberry-de-Valleyfield to create a new skating surface at Gault Elementary. "That's the next step," she says of building connections between the community and the program.

A number of projects are already underway, including a plan to start a community garden at Heritage Elementary School, where the horticulture students would work with and teach the younger children about gardening and where their food comes from in the process.

A second project involves growing an indoor tropical plant to be donated to the Huntingdon County Hospital in April for the new solarium being built. The students will also travel to Kahnawake to learn about traditional plants and especially about those used in the Mohawk culture.

And, as per tradition, the students have already been at work planting seeds and preparing for the upcoming spring plant sale set for April 26 and 27. All of the seeds used in the program produce non-gmo, organic and heirloom varieties whenever possible. There will be lots of herbs, at least twelve varieties of tomatoes, vegetables and a number of garden friendly perennials etc. A small-scale tree production has also been started, and there is a chance that the trees may be mature enough to be part of the plant sale.

Behind the Counter Cafe

For the coordinator of the Behind the Counter Café, Marie Claire Charlebois, the partnership with the horticulture



Students in the Horticulture program at HAECC cut lettuce they have grown for the Behind the Counter Cafe. PHOTO SARAH RENNIE

program has been very beneficial. "All of the vegetables we can get we can use," she says, of the healthy meals and soups the students taking part in the program produce on a weekly basis. The initiative began as a way of encouraging students to become more familiar with healthy food choices, meal preparation and responsibility for both the academic and SFIS students. It has become a phenomenal success, with students producing 35-40 affordable meals per week for the staff and students.

Each year a few students take part in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPAQ) food safety training program.

"The socializing part is also important and it brings students closer to the school staff," says Charlebois, who is especially proud of the success of the students and the pride they take in preparing these meals. In fact, this year alone, 3 or 4 students will be going on to cooking school when they finish the program in Huntingdon.

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