The Rid-All Green Partnership is an official training affiliate of the Growing Power Organization serving the Northeast Ohio region

By RHONDA CROWDER
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Two years ago, on Feb. 1, the dream of producing fresh vegetables, farm-raised Tilapia and jobs for inner-city residents came to life for three childhood friends – Randell McShepard, Keymah Durden and Damien Forshe – as they launched The Rid-All Green Partnership with a mission to transform the city.

Since that day, the Rid-All Green Partnership has emerged as trailblazing pioneers in Cleveland's green/sustainability movement.

The Rid-All Green Partnership, the first of its kind in Ohio, encompasses a number of initiatives, mainly the Rid-All urban farm located at 3129 Otter Avenue, sitting on approximately one acre of land in the 23-acre Urban Agricultural Innovation Zone – an area of the city known as “The Forgotten Triangle.”

Before the Rid-All Green Partnership took possession of the land, it was used as an illegal dumping site. Now, just a couple of years later, its home to 2 greenhouses, 4 hoop houses, and a composting yard. The Rid-All Farm is clearly the most developed within the zone.

With 4 employees and 7 to 10 volunteers, the Rid-All Farm harvests 150 to 200 pounds of vegetables a week that’s distributed to local restaurants. Depending on the season, they are growing corn, tomatoes, lettuce, zucchini, peppers, celery, collard greens, kale, broccoli, spinach and herbs such as sweet basil, thyme, and oregano. They also specialize in growing a wide variety of “superfoods” such as sprouts, wheatgrass and exotic heirloom plants.

“Growing food is the most sustainable thing you can do,” said Forshe, who became even more enthused to pursue the urban agriculture venture after reading PolicyBridge’s report, “Rebuilding Blocks: Efforts to Revive Cleveland Must Start by Treating What Ails Neighborhoods.”

According to Marc S. White, Rid-All site manager/farmer, their environmental research helped them to discover the ability to transform one acre of growing into two.

“That’s what it’s all about,” said White. “The Green Movement is only recycled, old-school sustainable Black culture anyway. It’s ancient wisdom in contemporary language.”

When asked why African Americans should become more active in the green movement, White explained that Black people and agriculture goes far beyond Black farming and share-cropping, that agriculture is encoded in our DNA.

“As a people in need of reconnecting with our ancient greatness, this ancient wisdom in contemporary language resonates,” he said.

And apparently so because these brothers have taken the green movement to the next level.

In addition to producing vegetables, they grow Tilapia in an aquaponic system that cleans and re-circulates water between the tanks and vegetables growing on a roof – that’s second level of growing White spoke about. They have 4 tanks: one 700 gallon, two 1200 gallon, and 1500 gallon; raising approximately 3000 naturally feed fish.

Their composting operation puts over 4000 pounds of food waste, collected every week from stores and restaurants, to use. The compost also acts as a heat source for the greenhouses during the winter. They generate about 1000 watts of energy.

“It’s the art of living, knowing how to use water and energy without wasting,” said White. He also explained that Black people have become consumers as opposed to producers. But, if we can begin to produce, we could reach another level of love and understanding.

Forshe, who also owns a green exterminating company, attributes the farm’s rapid growth to the various partnerships they’ve garnered and their dedication to helping the community.

In a nutshell, they see their work as an opportunity to get back to the basics in order to survive.

“We’re the wake up call, showing we can sustain ourselves and become more vibrant in the community,” said Forshe. But most importantly, he wants to educate his people about this culture of sustaining practice.

With that, they conduct a series of workshops offering intensive “hands-on” training in planning, developing, operating, and sustaining community food projects while “Green in the Ghetto,” initiative is dedicated to educating the youth and general community on healthy eating,

community engagement, and environmental sustainability.

This initiative has led to them publish a series of “Brink City – Green in the Ghetto” comic books, with a hip-hop twist and superheroes who fight environmental injustices, and distribute them to local students. The comics became a play that was produced at Karamu House last year.

“We’re doing a lot of things at a great level,” said White.

White, a trained fashion designer, has even created a green line of clothes from recycled materials. “It goes in conjunction with everything we’re doing,” he said. The clothes will be featured in a store at the Cleveland Arcade, set to open in April.

The founders of the Rid-All Green Partnership studied under Will Allen, whose Growing Power Inc.’s urban farms have brought healthy food to thousands of people in Milwaukee and Chicago while attracting national attention, including praise from first lady Michelle Obama.

The Rid-All Green Partnership is an official training affiliate of the Growing Power Organization serving the Northeast Ohio region under the Will Allen urban agriculture model. At the same time, it’s a model the Rid-All Green Partnership hopes to see replicated throughout Ohio.

“To know them is to love them,” said Jan Thrope of Innervisions, a small non-profit designed to discover, support and promote community improvement projects within Cleveland. “The three of them have turned that Forgotten Triangle into something unforgettable. I use the spot as a way to demonstrate what can be done in Cleveland.”