



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** Jason Maymon, CEDA (312) 890-3683  
Marsha Belcher, CEDA, (312) 523-5657

### **CEDA Launches “My Backyard Garden: Keepin’ it Fresh” Campaign Aims to Increase Youth Involvement in Urban Farming**

*The Gary Comer Youth Center, True Star Foundation and WCPT Radio’s Mike Nowak  
Join CEDA to address childhood obesity, healthier living*

CHICAGO—(May 2, 2010)—More teens are finding it fun to grow fresh fruits and vegetables on rooftops, in backyards and vacant lots throughout Cook County. CEDA plans to harvest that energy and mobilize a youth movement to encourage even more teens and young adults to grow local foods as a way to combat childhood obesity and lead healthier lives.

Today, CEDA announced the launch of “My Backyard Garden: Keepin’ it Fresh,” a public awareness campaign driven by a youth essay competition to help educate and encourage more teens to participate in urban agriculture. Winners of the essay competition will help break ground for a new backyard garden that will harvest fresh produce for local residents. CEDA enlisted the support of The Gary Comer Youth Center, True Star Foundation, and Master Gardener Mike Nowak, host of the Mike Nowak Show on Chicago’s Progressive Talk radio, to collaborate on My Backyard Garden.

“CEDA has always advocated the belief that healthy living begins with consuming nutritious foods,” says CEDA President and CEO Robert L. Wharton. “We currently provide food vouchers to many of our WIC families to use toward the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables. As an organization, we feel strongly about getting teens and young adults involved with urban farming so they too can eat and live healthy.”

“This might be the most important social movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” says Mike Nowak. “What could be more important to kids than learning how to feed themselves properly? People all over the country are taking their food security into their own hands. This campaign is about as grassroots—or ‘lemongrass roots’--as you can get.”

The Gary Comer Youth Center, which produces more than 1000 pounds of fresh vegetables annually atop their rooftop garden, have successfully developed programs that give youth hands-on experience cultivating everything from mustard greens to heirloom tomatoes. More than 85 teens are participating this year in the Gary Comer Youth Center’s Green Teen program. The focus of the program is for teens ages 13 – 18 to explore green careers.

-more-

“The youth are participating in all aspects of growing a wide variety of produce from seed to table through the center’s rooftop garden and three new community gardens,” says Marjorie Hess, garden manager at GCYC. “The Green Teens also learn how to prepare healthy meals in the center’s culinary program. “

Many of Illinois' urban, suburban, and rural communities lack nearby access to fresh, healthy foods. Residents living in underserved communities are commonly faced with limited food choices. Food choices that include diets high in calories with fats and simple sugars and lower intakes of fruits and vegetables are directly linked to obesity. Illinois has the 10th highest percentage of overweight youths ages 10-17 in the country, at 34.9 percent, according to the most recent data available by the National Survey of Children's Health.

"Growing food and preparing healthy meals is one way to actively involve youth to combat the growing trend of childhood obesity, added Hess."

"True Star Foundation is proud to partner with CEDA in an effort to get more youth interested in urban farming," said executive director DeAnna McLeary. "As a youth-focused organization we're closely connected to thousands of teens throughout the city and we like being on the forefront of initiatives like this that offer a creative approach to healthy living."

#### **About CEDA**

*CEDA is the nation's largest Community Action Agency serving more than 375,000 individuals annually and operating over 40 programs throughout Cook County in the areas of education, energy assistance, housing, economic development, family and children services, and health and nutrition. Visit [www.cedaorg.net](http://www.cedaorg.net).*

#### **About the Gary Comer Youth Center**

*The mission of the Gary Comer Youth Center is both simple and ambitious: to provide positive after-school alternatives with the goal of ensuring every youth in the Revere neighborhood graduates from high school prepared for college and careers. Visit [www.gcyhome.org](http://www.gcyhome.org).*

#### **About The Mike Nowak Show**

*The Mike Nowak Show - Chicago's only Progressive, Green, Gardening and Growing Local Radio Show, is heard on WCPT AM & FM, every Sunday from 8-10 am. WCPT is a strong advocate for locally-grown food and urban agriculture. Chicago's Progressive Talk is broadcast on 4 radio signals covering the entire Chicago metro area and beyond. Streaming 24/7 at [www.ChicagosProgressiveTalk.com](http://www.ChicagosProgressiveTalk.com)*

#### **About True Star Foundation**

*True Star Foundation is a nonprofit organization that provides a creative outlet in the form of literary and professional development programs for youth. The organization has eight programs that employ 150 student apprentices and seven adult instructors who collectively produce a 44-page quarterly publication, radio program, as well as teen events. Visit [www.truestarfoundation.org](http://www.truestarfoundation.org).*

**For more information about My Backyard Garden: Keepin' it Fresh visit [www.truestaris.com](http://www.truestaris.com). For more information about CEDA call (800) 571-CEDA (2332).**

###