



# *Parish Heartbeats: Stories of Faith In Action*

## **Tackling an Urban Food Challenge**

When the National Science Foundation (NSF) established an Art of Science Learning incubator at the Museum of Science and Industry here in Chicago, they were hoping to find 100 of the best and most creative minds in the area to brainstorm innovations related to urban nutrition. A diverse group of scientists, artists, teachers, college students, and high school students came forward to dedicate a year of their time as volunteers in this initiative. St. Margaret Mary parishioner Linda Dugovic was among them.

Many of you may know Linda and her family as long-time members of the parish. Big supporters of the Boy Scouts at SMMP, all three of her sons became Eagle Scouts. Linda loves to sing in the Contemporary Choir and finds a sense of community among its members. What you may not know is that Linda comes from an educational background in physics. After many career paths, she has found a way to combine her love of physics and her love of children in her current jobs with the YMCA Safe & Sound program in the mornings and teaching Engineering for Kids classes in the afternoon. This experience as educator and physicist, as well as being an artist (she currently works in quilt art), made her a perfect candidate for the NSF initiative.

For the first five months, all 100 people in the incubator explored the innovation process with many different types of artists. Linda's team then worked for 7 months to design a passive-watering apparatus that could be used on balconies in urban settings to grow small vegetables and herbs. As the project began, Linda found the whole issue of food deserts to be an eye opening revelation. "As a suburban person, I was clueless about food deserts ... areas where people didn't have access to fresh food within walking distance of their homes. They have to take buses or trains to get to the nearest grocery store. This lack of accessible nutrition results in higher rates of diabetes and obesity among these populations. I also learned that the ground in much of Chicago is contaminated because of the Chicago fire. That is why many places have rooftop gardens." The more she learned about the health care implications of the nutritional situation,

the more dedicated she became to working on a project that could make a difference. Thus was born the Seed Saddle.

The Seed Saddle is a lightweight growing mechanism meant to hang on a balcony. Capillary action takes water from a reservoir via a nylon rope watering the plants on the other side.

The team designed two sizes: small for growing one item, such as micro-greens; and large for growing three items, such as herbs and mini-carrots. Access to herbs and greens allows people to replace salt and fat for flavor leading to better nutrition. In addition to designing the Seed Saddle itself, Linda's team developed lesson plans that teachers could use to incorporate it into science lessons and recipe cards that families could use for their crops. A website is currently in development for these items, along with design specifications for building the Seed Saddle.



This is the Seed Saddle developed by Linda's team.

This project required complete strangers from different backgrounds to work together effectively. This is not always easy, but as Linda noted, "If you care, you don't give up! I also had my faith to rely on, which taught me how to treat other people. This was an opportunity to use my gifts to give back to the community."

The formal project work is complete but Linda's team has applied for an extension to continue work on the website. Only 3 of the original 10 team members are continuing so Linda invites any parishioners who are intrigued by this project and have web development experience to contact her at [lindadug@gmail.com](mailto:lindadug@gmail.com). For more information about the Art of Science Learning incubator, go to [www.artofsciencelearning.org](http://www.artofsciencelearning.org)

By Cabrina Attal

**Parish Heartbeats is an occasional bulletin column that celebrates the ways St. Margaret Mary parishioners make a difference in the lives of others.**