



Briana Kohlbrenner, Stasya Erickson and Rachel Somerstein in the St. Clare Theater, where Salt City DISHES holds its semiannual fundraisers.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

SALT CITY DISHES

GRASS-ROOTS
PHILANTHROPY
BENEFITS
COMMUNITY
GROUPS, SPIRIT
OF GIVING

| BY RENÉE K. GADOUA

After a hearty meal of local food, Reina Apraez, Symone Campbell and Sterling Lowry stood in front of more than 120 people on May 11 and pitched their idea: create a garden to serve the Nottingham High School community as a hands-on learning site and a source of food.

Campbell and Lowry, now Nottingham seniors, were so nervous they stumbled over their presentation. But buoyed by enthusiasm and sincerity, the group charmed the judges and won Salt City DISHES 4. With their \$1,000 prize, the three are working to make their project take root.

"I wanted the students to tell me what they wanted for the school and see that vision," said Apraez, a 2007 Nottingham graduate and a Hobart and William Smith Colleges graduate who works at the Syracuse Real Food Cooperative. "They were super excited to be at something where they were respected by adults. It was a cool event."

The Nottingham garden is among four Syracuse projects funded through community dinners organized by Salt City DISHES – which stands for Dine In, Support Happenings, Enliven Syracuse. (In a fifth project, coordinators collected proposals, then displayed them at community events; people bought a vote for \$1.) DISHES is part of an internation-

al movement that awards micro-grants through community meals. It's a way to connect community-minded people, celebrate local food and businesses and raise money for a small project that will improve Syracuse.

DISHES started in 2010, when Briana Kohlbrenner and Stasya Erickson, two enthusiastic transplants to Syracuse, began talking about the possibility. Friends had mentioned FEAST, the Brooklyn version of the international Soup Kitchen, a network of programs that fund small, innovative grassroots projects. Soon Rachel Somerstein, a Syracuse University doctoral student and freelance writer from New York City, was also on board. The three founding coordinators recruited volunteers and donors to produce the first Salt City DISHES in January 2011.

"Things kind of organically evolved," Kohlbrenner says.

Tickets for first event, at the 120-seat St. Clare Theater in the St. Clare Garden Apartments on the North Side, "sold out in what seemed like minutes," Erickson recalls. "The energy in the room was vibrating off the wall. People were engaging in conversation, the lights were twinkling, the food was amazing. The presenters seemed excited." The next three dinners sold out, too. DISHES 5 will take place in winter ▶



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

BRIANA KOHLBRENNER

Age: 37

From: Brooklyn

Family: Husband, Jason Kohlbrenner

Education: University of Buffalo

Job: Part-time program associate for The Gallery at Onondaga Community College and co-owns Echo, a collaborative arts and events studio

"I do things that are fun and happy for me and hope others like it."

Salt City DISHES started in 2010 and held its first dinner in January 2011. Each event has sold out.



DINNER 1 PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBYN STOCKDALE

2014.

Applicants must present a proposal for a community project with a public component, and while anyone can apply, the project must take place in Syracuse. The proposal cannot be to perform research or to buy supplies. "We try to get people to look at things with a new perspective," Erickson says. "There are so many great ideas in Syracuse that just need to be connected. This is a forum to connect people."

At the dinner, five to eight applicants present their proposal to the judges: the diners. Each person attending the dinner gets one vote, and the winner gets \$1,000, raised from the dinner, to implement his or her project. The coordinators said it's a break-even project.

"Some of these ideas were just small concepts when they applied," Kohlbrenner says. "As they solidified their plans for the presentation, they got more focused. And they get invested." Although only one project wins the grant, the organizers say there are no losers. "It's less about winning and more about the ideas," Kohlbrenner says.

Even without the grant, at least half of the projects took place, which the organizers attribute to the affirmation the applicants get during the dinner. "There's a generous spirit and people are very convivial and attentive," says Somerstein, who recently stopped working on DISHES to focus on her studies and writing. "If you don't have the spirit and the energy, it's not going to happen no matter how much money you have," she adds.

Syracuse artist Ty Marshal, for example, presented "There's a Sucker Born Every Minute: Recreating the Cardiff Gi-



ant" at DISHES 2 in May 2011. Marshal didn't win — Bikes-4Peace by Ursula Rozum and Jessica Maxwell did. But in October 2011, Marshal displayed a re-creation of the 10-foot sculpture that George Hull produced as a hoax in 1868. It was on display at Lipe Art Park and The Atrium at City Hall Commons. Filmmakers Sarah Sellman and Greg Grano, who submitted a proposal for DISHES On the Road, presented "Kindness Captured: A Day of Bravery and Kindness." In August 2012, volunteers handed out flowers and Popsicles, happy notes, hugs and handshakes in Syracuse.

The coordinators attribute DISHES' success to Syracuse's growing entrepreneurial and artistic community and to the neighborhood renewals taking place in the North and West sides of Syracuse. "We happened upon a time when people were ready for it," Kohlbrenner says. "Things kind of snowballed. One project takes off, then another, and you're not alone making things happen. The city is full of those moments right now. It's giving people new eyes to look at the city's possibilities."

The coordinators say they've been surprised and inspired ▶



DINNER 2 PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBYN STOCKDALE



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

STASYA ERICKSON

Age: 26

From: Russia, then Pennsylvania

Family: Husband, Andrew Erickson

Education: Syracuse University

Job: Program coordinator, communications and organizational development at Northside UP (Northside Urban Partnership)

"We're trying to get people to look at things with a new perspective."



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE GREENLAR

RACHEL SOMERSTEIN

Age: 31
From: Manhattan
Family: Husband, Joe Lingeman
Education: Cornell University
Job: PhD candidate in mass communications at Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and a freelance writer

"I did very little. I just made the vehicle. ... For me this is a way to make the world a little better."

by all the projects, but Somerstein conceded she especially liked Meghan Holtan's DISHES 3 project, "The Erie Canal's Rustiest Bike Circus Tour," which proposed circus artists biking between Rochester and Syracuse. "She didn't win, but it was so exciting and so dynamic," Somerstein said. "It took a lot of courage to present it. It showed people what a circus could be. It's a really creative idea. It makes people look differently at things."

In 2012, Salt City DISHES received a \$2,740 grant from the Gifford Foundation to help the organization do more outreach to city neighborhoods and to purchase food and decorations for their events. "We tend to like things that are unique, that are collaborative and engage the neighborhood," says Sheena Solomon, the Gifford Foundation's director of neighborhood initiatives. "This is grassroots individuals helping other grassroots individuals develop ideas. We thought it was very unique."

The micro-grants DISHES gives out complement the larger, more traditional grant makers, Solomon says. "The small organization and grassroots organizations don't necessarily have access to the big funders because a lot of them are not 501(c)(3). Community grant-making at that level is really important. It's not large, but it's important and impactful."

In other words, the DISHES coordinators say, you don't have to be a Rockefeller to build something. "With a ticket, they're purchasing a dinner and a ballot and a say and putting something toward something great," Kohlbrenner says.

The format of the competition also makes DISHES different, the coordinators say. "We're not the arbiters," Somerstein said. "We've taken it out of the black box. It's flattening. There are no experts. It's a way of asking the community what



DINNER 3 PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBYN STOCKDALE



they want."

Apraez, whose presentation won the most recent DISHES grant, said she expected to win. "I think that peoples' hearts get pulled toward doing things for youth," she says. "The other projects were neat and innovative, but were serving aesthetics, really. I had the young people angle."

She met the students while teaching a cooking class at Nottingham, and the proposal grew out of her work at the food co-op, her interest in permaculture gardening and hearing students' concerns about the environment and sustainability. (Permaculture refers to using the land in a way that is based on people care, planet care and fair share). "I wanted them to have the chance to present," she says. "They're 16 and 17 and they are really, really bright people with a lot of vision and enthusiasm. They really cared a lot about what was going to happen with the school and the city and the world."

In the fall, Apraez was preparing to plant onions and other perennials that are deer-resistant or food bearing. She's had to adjust the original plan as she's negotiated with school district administrators. But her goal remains the same. "It's an opportunity to learn about sustainability and the Earth," she said. "It gives opportunities for students to grow food and take it home and not have to rely on their own yard and have a little autonomy about where their food comes from."

Bikes4Peace, which won DISHES 2 on May 1, 2011, used the grant to buy tools and T-shirts for volunteers. The >

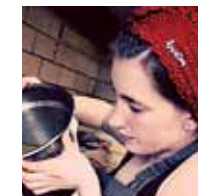


DINNER 4 PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALLISON GATES

SALT CITY DISHES TEAM

In addition to its founders, Salt City DISHES is supported by its team of volunteers. They are:

SARAH PALLO
DISHES chef, 2011-present: program coordinator for Northside Up



THERESA BARRY
DISHES decorator, 2013-present: artist and volunteer with Hopeprint, working with Syracuse refugee community



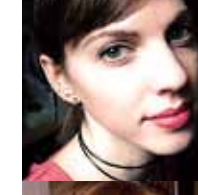
DAMIAN VALLELONGA
DISHES graphic designer, 2011-present. Owner of design/development company Lock49



ANDREW GREACEN
music coordinator, 2013-present: artist, producer, and recording engineer



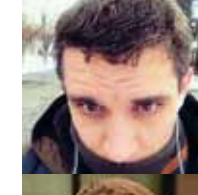
ALLISON GATES
photographer, 2013-present: painter, photographer, activist and web designer



SARAH MCVILVAIN
runner/messenger, 2013-present: Volunteer with Citizen Review Board, Planned Parenthood, Onondaga Citizens League



JAMIL MUNOZ
videographer, 2013-present: filmmaker



ANNALENA DAVIS
volunteer coordinator, 2013-present: owner and designer for Salty Lyon Prints, community volunteer



SALT CITY DISHES EVENTS

Salt City DISHES has put on six events, including four dinners. For DISHES "On the Road," coordinators collected proposals, then displayed them at community events. People could vote for \$1.

The next dinner will be in February 2014, with proposals due this fall. See saltcitydishes.blogspot.com for updates and deadlines.

DISHES 1: JAN. 23, 2011

Winner: Syracuse Urban Beautification Public Art Resistance (SUBPAR) by Tonja Torgerson and Joel Weissman. Artists crafted and installed screen-printed ceramic tiles on derelict buildings, including at 752 N. Salina St. and on telephone booths on Gifford and South West streets and at the intersection of Salina and East Washington streets.

DISHES 2: MAY 1, 2011

Winner: Bikes4Peace, by Ursula Rozum and Jessica Maxwell. Sponsored free bike clinics that taught kids how to fix their own bikes.

DANCE FOR DISHES: AUG. 21, 2011 (FUNDRAISER)

DISHES 3: FEB. 19, 2012

Winner: Salt City Slam, by Mozart Guerrier and Seneca Wilson. Held monthly poetry slam series at ArtRage Gallery that brought together amateur and professional spoken-word artists to compete for the title of Salt City Slam champion.

DISHES "ON THE ROAD": SUMMER 2012

Winner: Food Forest Gardening for Culture and Health, by Frank Cetera, Mack Macner and Andrew Greco. Seeking to create an edible forest garden planted with perennial fruits, berries, vegetables, herbs and tubers using permaculture design principles on Syracuse's West Side.

DISHES 4: MAY 11, 2013

Winner: Cooperative Permaculture Garden at Nottingham High School, by Reina Apraez, Symone Campbell and Sterling Lowry. Garden will serve the Nottingham community as a hands-on learning site for healthy skills and the sciences. It will also help feed students and family members in need.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY STASYA ERICKSON



Winners of previous Salt City DISHES:

- 1 Syracuse Urban Beautification Public Art Resistance (SUBPAR)
- 2 Bikes4Peace
- 3 Salt City Slam
- 4 Food Forest Gardening for Culture and Health
- 5 Cooperative Permaculture Garden at Nottingham High School

Syracuse Peace Council started the program in 2003. "We have a long-term vision of developing the project into a community bike space," says Ursula Rozum, a community activist who ran as the 2012 Green Party candidate for New York's 24th Congressional District.

She said she didn't expect to win, but saw DISHES as a chance to publicize the project and recruit volunteers. She was pleased by the affirmation and the grant. "DISHES is very generous in its mission," she says. "It allows people like me and other folks who are community-minded and have ideas about how to inject positive projects into the community to get them off the ground. We do a lot with very little resources."

For the organizers, the dinner itself is the highlight — "The event itself is tenfold amazing," Kohlbrenner says — but they hope they're also creating relationships and ongoing enthusiasm for improving Syracuse.

"People could take that creative energy and apply it to their lives," Somerstein says. "A lot of the projects are proving a vehicle for some kind of expression. If you're hungry and someone teaches you to fix a bike, it might not solve the hunger, but I believe it can help you in some way." ♦

RENÉE K. GADOUA IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND EDITOR WHO LIVES IN MANLIUS. FOLLOW HER ON TWITTER @RENEEGADOUA.



DINNER 4 PHOTOGRAPH BY ALLISON GATES

GIVING THROUGH YOUR IRA



The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 includes a renewed opportunity to make a tax-free IRA charitable rollover gift to The Salvation Army through calendar year 2013. While not tax deductible, this option may be especially attractive to donors who do not need the income they are required to withdraw from their IRA if they are age 70½ or older — funds which become taxable income.

Requirements for IRA qualified charitable distributions:

- Gifts are tax free up to \$100,000.
- Gifts will qualify for all or part of your required minimum distribution.
- This provision applies for 2013 only at this point in time.
- The IRA holder must be 70½ or older at the time of gift.
- Gifts must be made outright to a charitable organization directly from your IRA through your IRA custodian.
- Gifts may only be made from traditional IRAs and Roth IRAs, not a 401(k) or 403(b).

Any gifts must be made before December 31, 2013.



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If you have questions or would like to donate to The Salvation Army from your IRA, please contact: John P. Gleason, Director of Planned Giving at 888-434-1391.



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