

# Charity Spotlight

## Incredible Edible Park

BY SARA HALL | NB INDY

Teenagers from a local charitable organization gardened and gleaned over the weekend to help feed the needy in Orange County.

There were 10 high school sophomores from the Newport Mesa chapter of National League of Young Men harvesting lettuce, cabbage and broccoli Saturday at the Incredible Edible Park in Irvine.

The park grows fresh produce for Second Harvest Food Bank, whose mission is to eliminate hunger in Orange County.

"We are really committed to doing everything we can do to put food on the table for people who need it," said Nicole Suydam, CEO of Second Harvest. "The need in Orange County is greater than we are able to fill at the moment," she added.

Second Harvest collects and distributes food through about 480 program partners, feeding approximately 240,000 people each month, she explained.

The goal of Saturday was to pick 1,500 pounds of produce, which will contribute to about 6,000 meals, explained Sam Caruthers, Orange County harvest coordinator for the food bank and program director for the field.

This is an important part of the process, said Debbie Zimmerman, coordinator for the spring events for 10th grade boys in NLYM Newport Mesa.

Each year the young men have a different charitable focus in the organization, and during the boys' sophomore year it's about feeding the hungry, Zimmerman explained, adding that the Incredible Edible Park was a good match.

"When it's hands on, it means so much more to them," said Zimmerman, whose son, Kyle, helped in the field. "It's really important for them to do something...outside of themselves."

Reed Pfeiffer, from Newport Harbor High School, and Hunter Wetton, from Corona del Mar High School, both 16, agreed that they liked being outdoors

and doing something hands-on. "It's a good way to help the community," Pfeiffer said.

The fresh vegetables go to people who really need them, Wetton added, and they provide important nutrients that they may not get otherwise.

The boys were just happy to help, Zimmerman added.

Volunteers, like the Newport boys, are a crucial part of the process, Suydam and Caruthers emphasized.

About 6,000 volunteers help grow and harvest 500,000 pounds of produce every year, Caruthers said, which is enough for two million meals.

"Without volunteers, we could not do this," Caruthers said. "They are the most important part of the program."

Incredible Edible Park is supported by Southern California Edison and the city of Irvine.

The league, a Newport Beach-based service organization for young men in high school and their mothers, supports a variety of charities and events, including The American Cancer Society, local senior centers, youth groups, soup kitchens and more. They have cleaned



A National League of Young Men, Newport Mesa, volunteer carries a cart full of freshly picked vegetables to be distributed to the needy in Orange County.

up local walking trails, donated school supplies, walked to raise money for charitable causes and more.

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