



## CAMDEN CITY GARDEN CLUB, INC

Operator

Camden Children's Garden

3 Riverside Drive

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**For: Immediate Release**

### **AmeriCorps NCCC Volunteers & Camden City Garden Club Are On a Mission to *Green* Camden**

CAMDEN, N. J. (May 26, 2009) — On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at approximately 10:30am the unit leaders of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), are visiting the AmeriCorps team members to plant yet another Camden community garden at Camden's Joan of Arc Church in Camden's Historic Fairview Section. This will be the 19<sup>th</sup> faith-based gardens created as a part of a grant to prevent childhood obesity, sponsored by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)'s Faith-Based Initiative in Camden which is led by the Camden City Garden Club. AmeriCorps NCCC is vital source of community service workers for the Camden City Garden Club (CCGC) and Camden Children's Garden (CCG). The Club's Community Gardens Organizer Jesse Loub t is a former AmeriCorps Team Leader, who now coordinates the development and cultivation of these community gardens. Although the gardens are in their first year, they are forecasted to feed several hundred Camden families annually.

#### **About AmeriCorps NCCC Program**

These abundant faith-based community gardens would not be possible without the care, cultivation and maintenance of the AmeriCorps NCCC members. In March of 2008, AmeriCorps NCCC started to send 1 team of 10-12 members every 6 weeks and since May 2009 they have sent two teams of 10-12 members who come to Camden to serve their country through service programs.

AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) is a full-time, team-based residential program for men and women age 18-24. The mission of AmeriCorps NCCC is to strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct, team-based national and community service. In partnership with nonprofit organizations, state/local agencies, faith-based parishes and other community groups, AmeriCorps members complete service projects throughout the region. Drawn from the successful models of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s and the U.S. military, AmeriCorps NCCC is built on the belief that civic responsibility is an inherent duty of all citizens and that national service programs work effectively with local communities to address pressing needs. AmeriCorps NCCC requires an intensive, 10-month commitment and are trained in CPR, first aid, public safety, and other skills before beginning their first service project.

CCGC will welcome Team Wolf Unit Leader Chris Quaka, Support Team Leader Amanda Bashir and other AmeriCorps leaders, as they visit from the AmeriCorps NCCC Atlantic Regional Campus in Perry Point, Maryland. Chris and Amanda oversee and provide guidance to 6 teams of 10-12 corps members as they rotate volunteering for community service projects throughout the Atlantic region. During their visit on Friday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, these leaders will join their teams in Camden to checkup on projects and roll up their sleeves to help construct the Saint Joan of Arc Community Garden.

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The AmeriCorps members have helped the Camden City Garden Club to support Camden residents in creating twenty-four new community gardens - 19 of them faith-based! This program teaches Camden residents how to grow their own vegetables and fruit, so they can provide their families with healthy, nutritious produce.

While stationed in Camden, NJ, one AmeriCorps team live in the Historic Fairview Section of Camden and of course grow their own produce in their backyard. When these devoted young men and women are not busy growing food for the city or advocating healthy living, they are at the Camden Children's Garden, serving the visitors from near and afar as well as advocating for the Camden City Garden Club's many community service programs. These corps members aid in enhancing the 4.5 acres of gardens, the butterfly house, 3 amusement rides, and many imaginative child-themed exhibits. They also help manage activities at Garden festivals and teach educational programs for schools and family visitors. Camden City Garden Club and the Camden Children's Garden was awarded Sponsor of the Year Award by the AmeriCorps NCCC in 2008.

In addition to living in the City of Camden and supporting the programs of CCGC, the AmeriCorps teams also serve the community through volunteering for other Camden organizations such as Volunteers of America, the Walt Whitman Poetry Center, the New Jersey Tree Foundation and the Camden Maritime Museum.

### **ABOUT the Community Garden Organizer Jesse Loubét**

Jesse Loubét, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, is an instrumental part in the coordination of the gardens and has strengthened the relationship between CCGC and the AmeriCorps NCCC. Jesse first came to the Garden in July of 2008 as an AmeriCorps Team Leader in his 2<sup>nd</sup> year of AmeriCorps. Jesse instantly fell in love with the whimsical gardens as well as the programs of the Garden Club and he even mentioned to Mike Devlin that he would be interested in employment once his AmeriCorps tenure was over in November of 2008. It just so happened that the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant to fight childhood obesity through community gardening and education was being set in motion to begin construction on the faith-based gardens in December of 2008. When the grant called for the hiring of a coordinator for the logistics and planting of the gardens, the hard-working, bright-eyed AmeriCorps Team Leader seemed like a good candidate for the position. Today, Jesse gets to organize the incoming AmeriCorps, with kindred aspirations, to work in creating and maintaining the community gardens.

After graduating with his Associates Degree in the Culinary Arts at Pennsylvania's Keystone College in 2005 and then trying his way in the workforce, Jesse first enlisted in the AmeriCorps in July of 2006. While engaged in the AmeriCorps, Jesse served his nation with a shovel, traveling to places like Southwest Virginia to build park trails, and help Hurricane Katrina victims with Habitat for Humanity in Mississippi and New Orleans-based "Hope Has a Face" Organization. Jesse is excited to continue serving the community of Camden through his gardening role and continuing to partner with the AmeriCorps programs. He especially enjoys aiding with the nation's food security problems, helping needy inter-city families with accessing nutritional and free foods, as well as providing horticultural education. Executive Director Mike Devlin stated, "Despite being our 25<sup>th</sup> year of Community Gardening, this year has been our most dramatic expansion in numbers of gardeners and new gardens across the entire City of Camden."

### **About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Faith-Based Advocacy**

The Ninth & Sylvan Street Community Garden broke ground on Martin Luther King Weekend 2009, as part of Camden's Faith-Based Initiative, which is supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

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RWJF supports programs that address childhood obesity by improving access to low-cost, healthy foods, by encouraging more physical activity, and by enhancing nutrition/exercise education in schools and communities. In a new multimillion-dollar initiative, RWJF has joined with 21 faith-based coalitions across the country to help prevent childhood obesity by increasing access to healthy foods and physical activity through community advocacy.

The Camden City Garden Club was named one of those coalitions, as it partners with religious and neighborhood organizations to advocate community gardening. This garden, one of 18 community gardens built in partnership with the Faith-Based Initiative, is located near the Woodland Avenue Presbyterian Church, where parishioners and neighbors work with AmeriCorps volunteers to grow their own produce. Volunteers of AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct team-based national and community service. Two teams of AmeriCorps volunteers live in Camden neighborhoods throughout the year, splitting their working time between the Community Gardening Program and the Camden City Garden Club's programs, such as the Camden Children's Garden.

### About the Camden City Garden Club:

The Camden City Garden Club is a non-profit (501) (c) (3), membership-based, educational and environmental organization established in 1985 to assist Camden City residents with community gardening. The mission of the organization is to provide horticulture-based recreational and educational opportunities for residents of all ages of the City of Camden and the Delaware Valley. Over the years the Club has evolved to include many additional programs, including Community Gardening and Greening, Grow Lab, the Community Youth Employment Program and the Camden Children's Garden.

### Camden City Garden Club's Community Gardening

The Camden Children's Garden/Camden City Garden Club has been involved with community gardening in Camden for 25 years. Today, more than 2,000 Camden residents participate in the program. The Camden City Garden Club helps members who wish to clean up vacant, city-owned, trash-strewn lots and transform them into beautiful and productive community gardens. Neighbors come together to beautify vacant lots and to grow fresh, nutritious fruits and vegetables for their families. At a time when food security and childhood obesity are major issues, community gardens offer access to wholesome foods and healthy lifestyles.

### About the Camden Children's Garden:

The Camden Children's Garden wants you to *Come Outside and Play* at our facility on the Camden Waterfront. The Garden reopens to the public on March 21, 2009. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday. Admission is \$6 for adults, \$5 for children (age 3 -11), and children ages two and under enjoy the Garden free of charge. Be sure to ask about Family Memberships, Evening rentals and Birthday Party events. This 4.5-acre garden features a variety of themed educational exhibits for children including the Dinosaur Garden, a Giant Picnic Garden, Storybook Gardens, Red Oak Run and Tree House, Cityscapes Garden and more! Enjoy great indoor attractions including the Philadelphia Eagles Four Seasons Butterfly House, and Plaza de Aibonito, our Puerto Rican tropical greenhouse exhibit and Benjamin Franklin's Secret Garden and Workshop. Enjoy the Commerce Carousel, Arrow River Express Train Ride, and Spring Butterfly Ride for a modest fee. Additional information about the Camden Children's Garden is available online at [www.CamdenChildrensGarden.org](http://www.CamdenChildrensGarden.org), or by calling (856) 365-TREE.