

## **New “Nile of the North” Initiative features “Bicultural Healthy Living” framework**

by Ange Hwang, Asian Media Access

Asian Media Access (AMA) has joined forces with North Minneapolis’ community gardeners and other food sector leaders to start a new initiative - “Nile of the North,” which is a vision of creating a fertile green valley as a self-sufficient neighborhood in North Minneapolis. It is the result of years of community work and the BALL (Bicultural Active Living Lifestyle) Campaign, led by AMA and the Multi-Cultural Community Alliance (MCCA) committee, which have identified the most pressing food needs facing low-income immigrant/refugee, and African-American communities.

People of Color have experienced higher incidence of chronic diseases, higher mortality rates, and poorer overall health outcomes compared to Caucasians. MN is no exception, is even worse in many areas - MN has the highest disparity rate in education, employment, housing and in various health indicators through out the Nation between Blacks and Whites. The Food Trust released a report – *“Food for Every Child (2012),”* that painted a bleak picture of food access in MN. It found that Minnesota has fewer supermarkets per capita than most states, and that as a result the state’s residents—particularly those in lower-income and high-risk communities—face greater challenges finding fresh produce and other healthy foods. In order to solve these challenges, the Multi Cultural Community Alliance (MCCA) has planned together for the past few years, and proposed a new Initiative – Nile of the North - to expand the impact of our successful BALL campaign beyond physical exercise into community gardens and Vertical Farming, as well as geographic expansion to better serve targeted immigrant and refugee communities beyond Northside.

The Nile of the North project will build on MCCA’s success and extensive network of partnerships in the community. This Initiative will foster a unique cross-cultural, inter-generational approach to addressing these issues. The goals are to increase access to fresh, culturally-appropriate, and nutritious foods in a diverse low-income community, and to establish strong cross-cultural partnerships that can build on community assets to ensure sustainability and self-sufficiency within a “Bicultural Healthy Living” framework.

Asian Media Access will take the lead within MCCA to address these needs at the targeted low-income neighborhoods, with a special focus on immigrant and refugee members through a bicultural lens, with the below key tasks: 1) Expand existing urban farming and community gardening production, with a focus on culturally-specific crops; 2) Pilot a Vertical Farming Lab as a demonstration site for efficient production with limited space; 3) Foster cross-cultural and inter-generational learning through incorporating both traditional and innovative growing methods; and 4) Engage diverse communities in developing a collective infrastructure to meet

long-term food needs. "Nile of the North" will establish a new MCCA Advisory Committee with representation from community stakeholders to ensure sustainability. By working with cross-sector partners we will increase community cohesion around local food needs, avoid duplication of efforts, build on cultural assets and develop shared resources to ensure long-term food security for our most vulnerable populations.

As our community elder - Michael Chaney (Project Sweetie Pie) has indicated - *"Our strongest card is our collective cross cultural connection. It is unique, it is collaborative, it is transforming, and community building. We can't continue to live in communities as strangers. We are a community of strangers not neighbors. We need to start learning from one another, communicating with one another, building with one another through Nile of the North."*

We welcome more partners and feedback to perfect the Nile of the North, please contact our ED Ange Hwang at [angehwang@amamedia.org](mailto:angehwang@amamedia.org) for more info or you may call (612)-376-7715.