

BRAND Fall Meeting
Augusta Health
Thursday, November 5, 2015

Dietitians, dietetic interns, and students gathered earlier this month at Augusta Health in Fishersville, VA to network, hear from remarkable community members, and enjoy a nourishing meal to welcome in the autumn season.

Ryan Blosser, MA, Ed.S, Executive Director of **Project GROWS, Inc.**, shared the story of how he built a healthy foods initiative at the community level. Project GROWS is a non-profit organization with the mission to improve health in Staunton, Waynesboro, and Augusta counties by tapping into the potential of our young generations. Through local partnerships and grant funding, Ryan is able to keep a ten-acre farm running and also facilitate an educational haven for youth, including programs in nutrition education, hands-on farm training, and leadership development. From 2012 to 2015, membership increased from 85 to a staggering **3,860 youth** – which are quite a few hands in the dirt! Additionally, with a boastful **50,000 pounds** of food produced in 2015, food distribution programs are in place, including CSA, Farm to Table school partnerships, farmers markets with SNAP EBT, and donations. Ryan highlights the observable connection between kids growing food and eating food, and that more research is needed to endorse this idea and keep the mission of Project GROWS alive. However, Ryan emphasizes, “our job is to work ourselves out of a job,” creating a sustainable *community* passionate about health rather than a sustainable non-profit organization. If interested in volunteering with Project Grows, open volunteer days for adults and children alike are held every Thursday from 2:00-8:00pm, April through October. You can contact Ryan Blosser at ryan@projectgrows.org.

Next, leadership from the **PB&J Fund**, Alicia Cost and Chef Courtenay Evans, spoke about the sustainable and nourishing components of their community-based non-profit in downtown Charlottesville. Executive Director Emily Wampler started the PB&J Fund seven years ago with the mission of giving Charlottesville youth “the resources and knowledge necessary to help develop a healthy diet.” The primary program, Creative Cooking, guides youth through levels, from Explorer to Advanced, where they build upon cooking skills, in addition to food safety, culinary math, and nutrition. Another, called Primo Plato, focuses on the division of responsibility with mealtime for mothers and toddlers. Finally, Market to Meal helps parents produce a nourishing meal, from the grocery store to their child’s plate. **How do they “nourish?”** According to Alicia and Courtenay, they meet families where they are at, helping them build a relationship with food while building a healthy plate to enjoy amid friends. **How do they “sustain?”** Through community partnership, such as with local farmers, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Local Food Hub, PB&J can continue to serve Charlottesville youth. In addition, volunteers are always desired, particularly those with a background in food and nutrition, and play a large role in daily operations. According to PB&J leadership, each of us can be a food “MBV” – exemplifying the importance of **Moderation, Variety, and Balance!** Check out the PB&J Fund website for additional information regarding programs, recipes, volunteering, and more at <http://pbandjfund.org>.

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