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February 18, 2005

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## Local News Highlights

2/15/2005

### Youth Garden

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The Northwest Flower and Garden Show ended last weekend with a surprise winner for Best of Show. The award went to a first-time exhibitor, the non-profit group "Seattle Youth Garden Works." As KUOW's Julia Harrison reports, the group's goal is to provide job training for homeless youth.

18-YEAR OLD NICK PLESHA WAS LEAD GARDENER ON THE AWARD-WINNING PROJECT. HE SAYS MONTHS OF PLANNING, THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN DONATIONS, AND COUNTLESS HOURS OF LABOR WENT INTO ITS CREATION.

PLESHA: "Well I forced most of the vegetables from seed, which is put them in a green house and got them to grow. And I did a lot of the installation; I helped arrange most of the plants that went into it."

THE DISPLAY LOOKS LIKE A WELL-LOVED BACKYARD, COMPLETE WITH A COMPOST HEAP AND VEGETABLE PATCH. GARDEN WORKS' SPOKESWOMAN MICHELLE ZEIDMAN SAYS THAT REALISM APPEALED TO JUDGES.

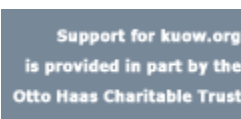
ZEIDMAN: "My favorite part is the fact that there are vegetables and produce mixed with the flowers and that it's not just a floral garden. We have used the vegetables to be almost like they're ornamentals. It's just gorgeous, and I don't think people normally think of their food as being really attractive in a garden, and I think it is."

THE JUDGING PROCESS WAS BLIND...JUDGES HAD NO IDEA THEY WERE RECOGNIZING A LANDSCAPING PROGRAM RUN BY HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE. THE PROGRAM STARTED TEN YEARS AGO IN THE U-DISTRICT. PARTICIPANTS GET EXPERIENCE IN LANDSCAPING AND ORGANIC GARDENING. THEY'RE PAID AN HOURLY WAGE, PLUS A SHARE OF PROFITS WHEN THE PRODUCE IS SOLD AT LOCAL FARMERS' MARKETS.

BEFORE HE JOINED YOUTH GARDEN WORKS, NICK PLESHA WORKED A STRING OF UNDER-THE-TABLE JOBS - NOTHING, HE SAYS, THAT HE COULD LIST ON A RESUME.

PLESHA: "People have been telling me now that there are companies that are doing other displays here coming up and asking us about hiring the people who do the internships after they leave the program to work for their landscape companies. So maybe I'll have my pick."

GARDEN WORKS STAFFER SAM O'BRIEN SAYS EVEN YOUTH

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WHO DON'T GO ON TO WORK IN GARDENING OR LANDSCAPING GET VALUABLE EXPERIENCE IN THE PROGRAM.

O'BRIEN: "They'll have a job in many different areas, but they'll say that what they really learned in our program is a sense of accomplishment and a sense of being able to be confident in their own abilities and decision making power. That they're able to choose something positive for themselves, and that's what we really pride ourselves on."

SOME OF THE PLANTS FROM THE WINNING DISPLAY WILL BE RETURNED TO THE NURSERIES THAT LENT THEM FOR THE SHOW. GARDEN WORKS HOPES TO SELL OTHERS AT AN UPCOMING PLANT SALE. O'BRIEN IS CERTAIN NOTHING WILL GO TO WASTE.

O'BRIEN: "I mean in the end we'll probably make a big celebration dinner."

I'M JULIA HARRISON, KUOW NEWS.

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