

SLUG Harvests 54 Teens

by Carvell Wallace

Parents, families, city officials, SLUG staff and youth celebrated the culmination of the fourth annual Summer Garden Internship this August at St. Mary's Urban Youth Farm. The graduation ceremony was held on Friday, August 18 under sunny skies and drew a crowd of about 350 community members eager to take part in the celebration of youth accomplishments.

The graduation program included a keynote speech by David Lee Crosby, Family Health advocate for the Department of Public Health and longtime homeless families and youth advocate. Mr. Crosby delivered a heartfelt talk about his own experience with crime and drug addiction, and encouraged youth to continue to move in bravery through the trouble they will face. Mr. Crosby also extolled the values of community support and gave his business cards to youth telling them that they could call him anytime and he would be there.

Other speakers included SLUG co-founders Pam Pierce and Ed Dierauf who marveled at the progress SLUG has made since its inception in the early 1980s. In addition, Winna Davis of the Mayor's Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, Sheila Arcelona of the Juvenile Probation Department, and Dee Schexnayder of the Mayor's Criminal Justice Council, were present as honored guests. These three agencies along with the Richard and Rhonda Goldman Fund and the United States Department of Agriculture comprise the funding for SLUG's youth program.



Youth worked hard all summer before their receiving their certificates of achievement at graduation.

The SLUG Summer Garden Internship employs 50-60 youth, primarily from Bayview-Hunters Point, to work approximately 35 hours a week on either the St. Mary's Urban Youth Farm or the Double Rock Community Garden located at the Alice Griffith Housing Development. Youth at these sites work on landscaping and habitat restoration and learn about organic farming and crop development. Youth interns also harvest the food they grow and distribute it, free of charge, to members of the community. In addition, this year's summer program grew to include a worksite at Heron's Head Park (Pier 98). Youth interns at this site focused primarily on habitat restoration, performed water quality tests, went on wildlife watches, and gained a deep-

er understanding of the environmental issues that confront Bayview-Hunters Point. All youth in the eight-week summer program took part in one week of intensive education and life skills workshops that included topics as diverse as health and drug education, urban design and planning and public speaking.

The graduation event saw 54 teens accept certificates of achievement, and awards of outstanding merit from their supervisors and peers. After the ceremony, guests enjoyed barbecued fish and chicken from Cliff's on Third Street and potato salad made from potatoes harvested at the farm

by the graduating teens, while enjoying music from a local jazz-hip-hop-fusion band, The Kushites.

Now SLUG staff is gearing up to begin the fall after-school employment program where the vehicle of community gardening can be used to touch more lives.

Carvell Wallace is the Youth Department Coordinator at SLUG.

