

From the Mid City Messenger

<http://midcitymessenger.com/2014/12/23/project-harvests-fruit-from-local-trees-for-the-community/#more-8593>

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By Fritz Esker, Contributing Writer

Mid-City residents are reaping the benefits of the New Orleans Fruit Tree Project, a program that provides free harvesting for fruit tree owners in the Greater New Orleans Area.



Volunteers harvest citrus for The Fruit Tree Project (Fritz Esker, Mid-City Messenger).

On Thursday, a group of volunteers harvested lemons and navel oranges from a tree at the Faubourg St. John home of local resident Charlie London. Last year, he said, the New Orleans Fruit Tree Project harvested over 350 pounds of lemons from that tree.

“They pick fruit that most folks can’t give away fast enough, help feed folks with it, and give you a tax deduction for the fruit they pick from your tree...What’s not to like?” London said about the project. The appeal of providing food for the needy attracts volunteers from all over the city and beyond. Jessica Griffin, for example, traveled to the Faubourg St. John from Violet, La. just to participate in Thursday’s harvest.

“The city needs to be fed,” Griffin said on Thursday. “It’s a wonderful idea.”

The program began in 2011 as a way to take excess fruit from tree owners and use it to feed the needy. Megan Nuismer, the executive director of the New Orleans Fruit Tree Project, said many people plant trees, thinking it will make a pretty addition to their yard. But they’re not prepared for the dozens, sometimes hundreds, of pounds of fruit they reap.

While Nuismer expects the 2014 harvest to be down from recent years due to an unusually cold winter, she estimates the year’s final harvest will total approximately 6,500 pounds of fruit. In 2015, however, she hopes the numbers will climb back to the 10,000 pound total the project reached in 2013.

Katie Donohue, harvest coordinator for The New Orleans Fruit Tree Project, said she was surprised that it’d taken so long for someone to form the organization.

“It’s such a simple idea that I wish I’d thought of it,” Donohue said.

Interested tree owners can simply call the New Orleans Fruit Tree Project. Organizers there contact volunteers to harvest the fruit, which is then distributed to charitable organizations like Food for Friends and Second Harvest Food Bank.

In Mid-City, some of the food goes to Tulane Community Health Center, at the corner of Broad and Orleans. Most of the people who visit the center are low-income, Donohue said, and the fruit bowls in the lobby give them access to a healthy snack while they wait. Patients are offered oranges and satsumas to take home with them, too.

“They’re always thrilled when they see the fruit I bring in for them,” Donahue said.

Donators can receive a tax deduction. Just as when someone drops off clothes at Goodwill, those who give away fruit receive a receipt for the donation, and it’s up to them to estimate the overall value.

The goal of the project isn't to just harvest trees, but to plant more of them. So far, fruit trees have been planted in neighborhoods like Central City, the 8th Ward, and the Upper 9th Ward, organizers said.

For those interested in donating to the cause, the project is hosting the "Citrus Celebration" fundraiser on Jan. 28 at Propeller on the corner of Broad and Washington. Eight New Orleans bartenders will craft cocktails featuring citrus or another local fruit, and attendees will vote on the winner. Tickets are \$20 per person and the event runs from 6-9 p.m.

For more information, visit www.nolafruit.org.