

Chin Community Garden in Columbus Ohio

There are many community gardens in the city of Columbus. Columbus has more community gardens than any other cities in the entire United States. The Chin Community Garden in Gantz Rd is one of them. The garden belongs to Emmanuel Chin Baptist Church (ECBC) which represents the Chin community in Columbus. The pastor for is Dr. Hai Vung Lian a native of Chin in Myanmar who lead the Chin community in Columbus.

The Chin people in Columbus came from Myanmar as refugees and settle in Columbus area. Some Chins came to Columbus earlier than 1996 but they were very small in number. A large number of Chin came to Columbus only in 2009. These refugees miss their own country since they came from the society of farming in Myanmar. They have stress when they work in warehouses, factory and packing etc without connecting with the land. Creating a community garden is more than foods and economy for the Chins because the land makes connection the two cultures namely the Chin culture (farming culture) and the U.S culture (high tech culture) together. Moreover the human spirit is always connected natures such as the land, water, forest, plants, trees, fountain, mountain and pond so on and so forth in the Chin tribal culture. So having a garden is much more than foods; it promotes and creates stronger spirit for the Chin Christians in Columbus. The garden creates a better relationship among the people in the community. It creates a sense of Christian values such as love, kindness, helping one another, sharing things and unity in the community.

So the community garden is so important for the immigrants for their psychological, physical, spiritual social and mental health. One can see that the garden reduces the stress of a person in many ways today. At the same time the garden saves hundreds of dollars for the Chin families. Some of the vegetables were sold to other Chins in Kentucky areas.

The garden was sponsored by the Franklin Park and Conservatory. Mr. Bill Downton (Franklin County Commissioner), Kate Matheny (Grant Coordinator) and Lori Murphy (a student at Ohio State University) helped creating this Chin Community Garden. Franklin Park and Conservatory spent \$7,300.00 total for creating this garden for both in 2011 and 2012. The garden is fenced by Graves Fence Company. The Scotts Miracle Grow Company donated more than 220 bags of top soils for the garden in 2012.

The garden has a long history. It was first created in 2011 in the place of an old house which was probably built with stones and bricks. The land was filled with a lot of stones, bricks and sand when the farmer plowed the field in the summer of 2011. It was impossible to create the garden that year because of the timing and the soil condition. The famer who plowed the field abandoned the garden in 2011 because the land was filled with bricks, stones and sands. But the Emmanuel Chin Baptist Church youth voluntarily picked up the stones and bricks about 2-3 tones. Finally the garden was successfully created in the spring of 2012.

The garden is pretty successful today. There are about 65 Chin families living in Columbus. The Chins are hard workers. They love farming, gardening and planting vegetables. They plant variety of spicy, cabbage, four kind of *anthur* (roselle), *hmaihrem* (little pumpkins), *hamhhmui* (Chin mint), *putinan*, *kamphe* (a native mint-plant in the Chin State) and *mai-an* (pumpkin leave), *zungpate-thi* (lady finger)

and Chin egg plants etc. The plants are so good; they are pretty big and tall. The soil of Ohio is pretty good and suitable for those kinds of tropical plants. Some plants are much larger and taller in Ohio than in Chin States, Myanmar.

The garden is in the southwest side of the city. It is about 3 miles from where the Chin people live. The Chin people love it and enjoy it every day. There are some five most important benefits that the Chin Community Garden has produced. It gives us joy and peace; it reduces stress and heals loneliness; it saves a lot of money for the immigrants. It connects friends, relatives and church members. The garden produces a lot of the Chin cultural foods and that benefits the entire community today. The garden also makes Columbus greener and a better place to live. The garden makes the community a joyful place to live.