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## **Capital District Community Gardens Expands Fresh Produce Access in Inner-City Markets**

Capital District Community Gardens' Healthy Convenience Store Initiative staff installed a refrigerator at Hulett Street Market today, and will immediately begin distributing fresh produce to the Hamilton Hill neighborhood store twice a week. The Healthy Convenience Store Initiative, which is sponsored by MVP Health Care, gives fresh produce a daily presence in urban neighborhoods with limited access to nutritious food. CDCG installs custom-designed refrigerators in convenience stores, where urban residents shop every day, and partners with local business owners to stock them with fresh, affordable food.

"USDA nutritional guidelines recommend that we fill half of our dinner plate with fruits and vegetables," says Denise V. Gonick, President and CEO of MVP Health Care. "But for many, finding fresh fruits and vegetables to fill their plates isn't easy. Capital District Community Gardens' Healthy Convenience Store Initiative is providing greater accessibility and the opportunity for fresh fruits and veggies to be part of every meal. MVP Health Care is proud to support this project as part of our work to create healthier communities."

CDCG also established fresh produce delivery service at NABS on Van Vranken Ave. and the 15<sup>th</sup> Street Grocery in Troy this month, marking the highest level of simultaneous growth The Healthy Convenience Store Initiative has seen since the program's launch in 2011. HCSI launched the program with five participating locations, one of which was in Schenectady. CDCG now distributes fruits and vegetables to 14 convenience stores throughout the Capital Region, four in Schenectady.

"Customers kept asking me to carry produce, but I couldn't figure out a way to do it," says Hulett Street Market Store Manager, Ibrahim Seidi. "Then my cousin, who runs the IBB Grocery here in Schenectady, told me that he orders his produce from Capital District Community Gardens. Now I partner with their Healthy Convenience Store Initiative. Customers are happy that they can buy produce at my store and I'm glad I can provide it for them."

Earlier this year, CDCG partnered with the Hamilton Hill Arts Center after school program to involve local children in raising awareness about the fresh produce that is now available in their neighborhood. Children were given a sampling of fruits and veggies and assisted with the creation of recipes that they brought home to their families, along with a list of HCSI locations.

“A child has the power to change their entire household’s eating habits,” says Amy Klein, CDCG’s Executive Director. “What parent wouldn’t want to run out to buy broccoli if their six-year-old requested it? Rewarding your child’s choice to eat healthy can, however, be difficult if you rely on public transportation to access fresh food in distant supermarkets. We are so thankful that, with the support of MVP Health Care and the local business owners with whom we partner, young children in many of our region’s inner city neighborhoods are now able to request nutritious food that is accessible within walking distance of their homes.”

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*Capital District Community Gardens is a 38 year old nonprofit organization that nourishes healthy communities with nearly 50 Community Gardens, The Veggie Mobile, The Healthy Convenience Store Initiative, The Produce Project, Squash Hunger and more.*

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