

Healthy picking: Abundant fruit for needy families

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Some New Orleans households with limited resources may not be able to afford the healthier foods that contribute to a balanced diet. Tulane alumna Megan Nuismer is trying to change that by making fruit accessible through the New Orleans Fruit Tree Project.



Tulane alumna Megan Nuismer leads volunteers who gather fruit that's free for the picking and donate it to community organizations. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)



Citrus fruit is abundant this season in Louisiana.

The concept is simple. It originated during Nuismer's time as an [AmeriCorps VISTA](#) volunteer at the [Hollygrove Market & Farm](#).

Nuismer locates people in the community willing to donate their fruit trees to the effort. Then she recruits volunteers to harvest the fruit, which is transported to local food pantries, health clinics or nonprofit organizations for distribution to those who need it most.

Now a program of the Hollygrove Market & Farm, the Fruit Tree Project is gaining momentum in the community.

“What it's leading to is a really great network of tree owners, volunteers and the organizations that are receiving the food,” says Nuismer, who received her master of public health degree in 2010.

Currently, the Second Harvest Food Bank receives the majority of the fruit but this year the fruit tree project began working with the [Tulane Community Health Center at Covenant House](#).

Nuismer and her volunteers are busy right now because it's the middle of citrus season, which runs from November through late March. Oranges, kumquats, grapefruits, satsumas and lemons are abundant throughout the city.

“Our goal for this year for citrus season is 10,000 pounds, and we actually just hit 4,000,” Nuismer says. “We've got about 6 weeks left in this season and next year

we'll raise that goal all over again.”

Nuismer has nearly 50 “registered” fruit trees whose owners have expressed interest that their tree be harvested.

The [Fruit Tree Project](#) is looking for more volunteers as well as fruit trees ready for picking.

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