

NORTH END MATTERS

ISSUE TWO FEBRUARY 2025

Planting Seeds of Change Celebrating the Specialty Crop Manager Program



2024 Graduates of the Crop Manager Program

Photo courtesy of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections

Last year, NECIC, in partnership with the RiCI (Richland Correctional Institution) and Central State University Extension, officially celebrated the ribbon cutting of the NECIC/RICI Agricultural Site at 1155 S. Olivesburg Rd. in Mansfield. This site, known as Flourish Farms, is home to a unique and transformative program where incarcerated individuals gain hands-on agricultural experience while working on a fully operational urban farm adjacent to the Richland Correctional Institution.

Participants in this program not only engage in the daily operations of the farm but also complete coursework in essential agricultural topics, including:

- Crop Planning
- Business Management
- Site Preparation
- And much more
- Irrigation

The impact of this farm extends far beyond its fences. The produce grown at Flourish Farms, along with NECIC's Urban Farm on Bowman St., is sold to local restaurants and markets like the NECIC North End Farmers Market through the Richland Gro-Op. By increasing access to fresh, locally grown food, this initiative plays a critical role in addressing food insecurity and advancing the goals outlined in NECIC's Community Economic Development Plan (CED).

In December, NECIC proudly celebrated a group of incarcerated men who completed the program and earned their certificates from Central State University. These individuals reflected on their achievements from the 2024 growing season—a season in which Flourish Farms produced over

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Letter from the Interim CEO

Planting Seeds of Second Chances and New Beginnings

Dear Friends,

As we step into this new season, I am reminded that the most profound change often starts in the most unexpected places. At NECIC, we have always believed in the power of second chances—not just for individuals, but for communities. In a world where political divisions and economic uncertainty dominate the headlines, we remain committed to the work that transcends these challenges: investing in people, fostering resilience, and cultivating opportunities for new beginnings.

This commitment is at the heart of Flourish Farms, a program that embodies the transformative potential of second chances. Through our partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections and Central State University Extension, we are not just teaching agricultural skills—we are restoring dignity, purpose, and possibility for those ready to rebuild their lives. The fresh produce grown by program participants nourishes our local economy and provides a tangible reminder that growth is always possible, even in difficult soil.

Our belief in new beginnings extends beyond agriculture. Whether it is supporting entrepreneurs, revitalizing neighborhoods, or advocating for fair access to opportunity, NECIC remains steadfast in its mission. We know that communities thrive when people are empowered to chart their own futures—when we see strength where others see struggle, when we invest in talent where others see obstacles.

The road ahead will not be without challenges. But history has shown us that progress is not made by waiting for better conditions—it is made by those willing to plant seeds today, trusting that a brighter future will follow. NECIC stands ready to do just that, and I invite you to join us in this work. Whether as a volunteer, a partner, or an advocate for change, your support strengthens the foundation of a more just, inclusive, and thriving Mansfield.

Together, we will continue to turn setbacks into comebacks, uncertainty into opportunity, and division into shared purpose. Thank you for being part of this journey.

With Gratitude and determination,



Tony Chinni
Interim CEO
North End Community Improvement Collaborative (NECIC)



Tony Chinni, Interim CEO



Interim CEO
Tony Chinni

Founder
Deanna West-Torrence

Operations Manager
Tionna Perdue

Development Officer
Melissa Drozda

Community Organizer
Aurelio Diaz

MBAC Director
Alan Mitchell

Business Development Mgr.
Dena Kmetz

Marketing Coordinator
Lucas Gerber

Staffing Specialist
Jacqueline Williams

Urban Farmer
Josiah Remy

Staff Accountant
Jeanette Temple

Business Advisor
Doug Litteral

Business Advisor
Shanican Pender

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Employee Highlight

A Familiar Face Returns to NECIC as a Business Advisor

Shanican Pender, BS, MSA, and Salon Owner of Lotus House Beauty and Wellness. Shanican is no stranger to the Mansfield community and is also a former resident of the North End. She is certainly no stranger to our work at NECIC, previously Shanican worked with NECIC as a Community Organizer from 2008 until 2013.



**Shanican Pender, BS, MSA,
Owner of Lotus House Beauty and Wellness**

Ms. Pender has spearhead collaborations with community leaders, local and state agencies, schools and universities, businesses, and faith-based organizations. Her numerous projects and partnerships are many. from 2008 to 2011 she coordinated the Mansfield Local Conversations on Minority Health Disparities. In addition, she also facilitated the Live Healthy Initiative (Healthy U) in 2012 and 2013, which was a series of workshops held for six-weeks that focused on Chronic Disease Self-Management and Diabetes Self-Management in the Mansfield community and at the Mansfield Correctional Institution (MANCI). In 2021 and 2022 she was a guest facilitator with the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless.

Shanican graduated from Wilberforce University with a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Management and a Master of Science in Administration with a concentration in Leadership from Central Michigan University.

Her professional training includes the Northwestern University - Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute, Ohio Department of Youth Services - Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Institute, and Stanford University - Chronic Disease Self-Management and Diabetes Self-Management Program. She also held a seat on the Ohio State

University Office of Multicultural Affairs Advisory Board and the Diversity Committee of the Richland County Red Cross. She is currently a member of Ohio Women Against Domestic Violence.

A former Qualified Master Health Specialist with Directions for Youth and Families and a Community Outreach Coordinator with UMADAOP. Ms. Pender has always had a deep compassion for helping individuals find positive solutions to overcome their personal barriers.

With over 30 years of experience in cosmetology, Shanican continues to keep herself busy working part time in her hair salon. Her goal is to offer a more holistic approach where the priority of self-care encompasses not only hair care but also provide a relaxing atmosphere for men and women.

Ms. Pender has now embarked on a new adventure working for the Minority Business Assistance Center (MBAC)-Mansfield as an Advisor. She plays a pivotal role in providing guidance, resources, and support to entrepreneurs and minority-owned businesses.

Shanican shares “I have always had a passion to help others in every career. My new position with MBAC is another layer and a great building block to my foundation for my future. Knowing I have an opportunity to help others fulfill their dreams and assist in helping them understand how to have a sustainable business is a perfect match”.

We’re excited to welcome back Shanican Pender to the NECIC team! If you're looking to start your own business, secure access to capital, or have any questions, Shanican is here to help! She can be reached by emailing ***Shanican@necic-ohio.org*** or by calling ***419-522-1611***

From Tragedy to Transformation:

How Corey Jones' Legacy Inspired NECIC and a New Vision for Mansfield

The following is the story of how the tragic murder of a young man catalyzed a paradigm shift in Mansfield and Richland County, ultimately inspiring the founding of the North End Community Improvement Collaborative (NECIC).

The Deficit-Based Approach: A Double-Edged Sword

For decades, social service providers relied on a deficit-based approach to determine eligibility for assistance. While this method had compelling merits, including its focus on problem identification and resource allocation, it came with significant drawbacks. The deficit model emphasized diagnosing and addressing challenges but often overlooked the potential and strengths within individuals and communities.

The benefits of the deficit approach include:

- **Effective Problem Identification:** It highlights areas most in need of improvement.
- **Resource Justification:** Many funding bodies require documented evidence of deficits to allocate resources effectively.
- **Risk Management:** Targeted interventions help mitigate negative outcomes.
- **Data-Driven Insights:** Emphasis on measurable problems facilitates tracking progress.
- **Alignment with Policy Frameworks:** Many social service policies prioritize deficit-based interventions.
- **Professional Training:** Social workers are often trained in problem-solving models that focus on addressing deficits.

However, the drawbacks became increasingly apparent:

- **Stigmatization:** Labeling individuals or communities by their deficits perpetuates negative stereotypes.
- **Dependency:** Focusing on what people lack fosters reliance on social services rather than empowerment.
- **Disempowerment:** Top-down solutions often fail to engage community members in meaningful ways.
- **Undermined Resilience:** Ignoring existing skills and networks stifles innovation and community-led solutions.
- **Narrow Scope:** Defining eligibility by deficits overlooks systemic issues like access to education, healthcare, and employment.
- **Psychological Impact:** Emphasizing deficits lowers self-esteem and mental well-being.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, it became clear that continuing the same deficit-driven methods while expecting different results was futile. The time had come for a new approach.

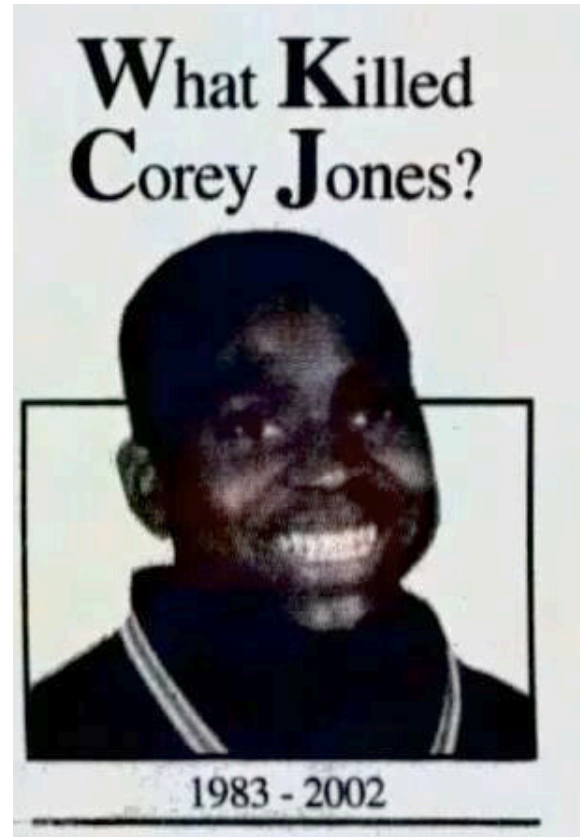


Photo courtesy of the Mansfield Richland County Public Library's Sherman Room. Originally published in the Mansfield News Journal, October 11, 2002

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Kay's Korner: Aurelio Diaz Brings Back Free Dance Classes

For Mansfield City Councilman and NECIC Community Organizer Aurelio Diaz, dance has always been about more than just movement, it's a way to bring people together. Since 2017, Diaz has offered

community dance classes as a way to connect with residents, stay active, and encourage others, 100% Free.

Originally, the classes ran until 2019, but like many community events, they were put on hold in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in June of last year, Diaz reignited the program, offering park-based dance meetups across Mansfield.

These outdoor classes not only got people moving but also showcased the city's many beautiful parks.

"These classes have always been a way for me to get people outside and exercising," Diaz said. "But also to not feel like it's exercise."

His classes welcome dancers of all ages and abilities, from young kids to North End elders, and he even provides chairs for those who prefer a seated dance style. On some occasions, he hosts the classes in his own studio space at La Luna, located at 32 North Walnut Street.

Diaz wasn't sure if people would be interested in dancing during the colder months, but he decided to give it a try. "It's January, but let's try it out and see if people are still interested—and people have been

coming and really enjoying it," he said.

When asked what he enjoys most about teaching dance, Diaz responded with a smile. "A lot of people say they aren't good dancers, but I always tell people, as long as you can move, you can dance."

For those feeling nervous about stepping onto the dance floor, Diaz has some words of encouragement. "Everyone is

nervous their first time, but once you realize that nobody is watching you and that everyone is focusing on themselves, you just let go." He even suggests a fun mindset for beginners: "Envision this dance as your own music video."

Beyond the joy of movement, Diaz also loves the creative challenge of choreographing routines to different styles of music. Since restarting the classes, he has seen between 10-15 participants join each Monday, proving that the community's enthusiasm for dance is alive and well.



Dance Fitness Class at La Luna

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Geneva "Kay" Smith

About Kay's Korner:

North End resident Geneva "Kay" Smith was a community organizer for NECIC. She was passionate about the North End community until her untimely death in November 2019. In addition to being a North End resident through-and-through, Kay was passionate about non-violence and her family. In Kay's Korner, we will spotlight different strong people from the North End who are handling their business in their career, the community and with their families. May this be one way to honor our dear sister Kay's memory and continue her legacy of being a strong, empathetic individual who was also a great mother. May she Rest in Peace.

Aurelio Diaz Brings Back Free Dance Classes Continued From Page 5

Whether you're a seasoned dancer or have two left feet, Diaz welcomes everyone to come and experience the joy of movement, one step at a time. Currently Aurelio's Dance Fitness class is meeting every Monday in March from 5:30-6:30pm at La Luna located at 32 North Walnut Street in Mansfield.



Interested in Joining? For more information contact Aurelio Diaz at 419-417-0717

Planting Seeds of Change Continued From Cover Page

14,000 pounds of fresh produce, including watermelon, tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, kale, cauliflower, flowers, and more!

While not every participant completes all the required hours to earn certification, many still engage in the program, balancing farm work with other responsibilities. More than just an agricultural training program, Flourish Farms is a stepping stone to new opportunities. NECIC's Walt Bonham, who oversees the program, shared that one of the most rewarding

aspects is "building relationships with the participants before their release and staying connected with many of them afterward".

As we look ahead, the Flourish Farms program continues to grow. The 2025 group began their training in March, starting with classroom learning before they will move outdoors as the weather warms up. With each season, this initiative continues to cultivate not just crops, but also knowledge, opportunity, and a brighter future for all those involved.



Crop Planting at Flourish Farms



2024 flourish Farm Ribbon Cutting

From Tragedy to Transformation Continued From Page 4

The murder of 18-year-old Abshadu “Corey” Jones on January 27, 2002, was a turning point. Corey’s death in an arson attack at 400 W. Fifth Street ignited conversations that transformed Mansfield’s approach to social challenges. Corey, a teenager in the county childcare system, had befriended Jim Kulig, Director of Court and Community Services for Richland County Juvenile Court. Jim, like others in the community, had grown frustrated with endless planning and needs assessments that failed to yield tangible results.

When the Chamber of Commerce proposed yet another drug and alcohol needs assessment, Jim introduced the concept of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), developed by Professor John McKnight of Northwestern University. Unlike the deficit model, ABCD focuses on leveraging existing assets and strengths within communities to drive sustainable change.

The Chamber agreed to explore ABCD, and a group of local leaders convened to pilot this innovative approach. The group included:

- Deanna West-Torrence: 5th Ward City Councilwoman and Director of the Ocie Hill Neighborhood Center.
- Greg Frankenfield: Richland County Children’s Services Program Supervisor.
- Karen Moody Byerly: Executive Director of Community Action for Capable Youth (C.A.C.Y.).
- Joan Day: Kinship Program Director and founding NECIC Board Member.
- Kevin Nestor: Executive Director of the Richland Area Chamber of Commerce.

These leaders traveled to Chicago for ABCD training with John McKnight, thanks to funding secured by Tom Brennan, Publisher and Editor of the Mansfield News Journal. Tom, a mentor to Deanna, played a key role in raising awareness and financial support for the initiative. Another critical

influence was McKnight’s book, *The Careless Society*, introduced to Deanna by NECIC founding board member Joe Mudra. This philosophy inspired Deanna and others to prioritize community empowerment and self-sufficiency.

“What Killed Corey Jones?”

In October 2002, the Mansfield News Journal ran a transformative eight-day series titled “What Killed Corey Jones?” The series examined the systemic issues confronting at-risk youth in Richland County, such as parental incarceration, substance abuse, and the absence of stable family structures. A pivotal quote from the series captured the essence of NECIC’s mission:

“Community discussion must become community action if we are to save children who are at risk.”
– Mansfield News Journal, October 11, 2002

This public dialogue spurred community leaders into action. Corey’s life and tragic death became a rallying point for systemic change, leading to NECIC’s founding by concerned North End residents and stakeholders committed to the welfare, education, and well-being of children.

A Legacy of Change

Corey Jones’ story and the community’s response highlight the power of asset-based approaches in transforming lives and systems. NECIC not only emerged as a result of this shift but also became a catalyst for a broader movement in Mansfield, embracing innovation, inclusivity, and the untapped potential of its people.

NORTH END COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE

March NECIC Events

- Mar 22nd - Trap Bingo: March 22nd at 134 N. Main Street, Mansfield *****SOLD OUT*****
- Mar 26th - Elder Program Bingo: from 12-1:30pm at 376 W. Longview Ave, Mansfield
- Mar 28th - Faith Based Advisory Breakfast: 9-11am at 134 N. Main Street, Mansfield



Announcements from Mansfield Richland County Public Library

Book it to the goal!

- Each time you check out an item March 3-29, you'll automatically be entered to win one of two \$50 Walmart gift cards

Need tech?

- Eligible customers can shop with PCs for People to purchase low-cost computers and internet service and pick up their purchase at any MRCPL location.

Need Tech help?

- Call 419-521-3146 (Library learning lab) to join a group class or schedule individual help



NECIC

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Address Label Here