

Atlanta's Urban Farming Visionary Steps Down & Moves On

by Noah Chen

The year is 1968, and Rashid Nuri, the man who would later be called the godfather of agriculture in the South, is growing a small crop of corn in a backyard in San Diego, California. “I had heard the way to properly eat corn is first to boil water, then go cut the corn and drop it in there for a minute and that would be some good eats. So that’s what I was striving for,” says Nuri. “That was a long time ago. My work has evolved from there over the years.”



Rashid Nuri at Washington Road Farm
(PHOTO: JOIA JEFFERSON NURI)

What his work evolved into was Truly Living Well, a successful urban-farming and community-growth organization.

“I’m a child of the sixties, and in the sixties, we’re talking nation building, black power. In order to build a nation, you gotta be able to feed, clothe and shelter your people,” explains Nuri.

“The first work I did out of university was the same thing we’ve done with Truly Living Well. We had a community garden, community farms, and we taught children in school,” Nuri continues. “But in 2006, the world was more ready than it had been.”

Even so, a lot needed to be done to get the project off the ground.

“Technically, it was illegal,” says Nuri, explaining that given the agriculture zoning laws at the time. “You couldn’t have any structures related to agriculture,” unless specifically zoned as such. Relaxing the zoning laws was just as important as

relaxing the laws dictating who and what could be sold at farmers’ markets.

“I’ve been able to watch the growth from when we weren’t able to find a farmers’ market to now, when you can find one just about every day of the week,” says Nuri.

Nuri recently stepped down as CEO of Truly Living Well. “The question I have to ask myself is, ‘Has my assignment been fulfilled?’ The answer is unequivocally, ‘Yes.’”

He is being succeeded by Carol Hunter, the organization’s new executive director, who started as a consultant for the nonprofit in 2011.

“When I saw the value of the work they were doing, it really piqued my interest and developed a passion in me to do this work and advance the organization,” recalls Hunter. She is proud of the programs she has helped create as it brings families and communities closer together while providing nutrition and education.

“The program closest to my heart is the Growing Families program,” she explains. The program uses urban agriculture as a family intervention tool to create an environment for mother and child to work together toward a common cause in a new and positive way. Hunter says the work at Truly Living Well also boosts the local economy, and in doing so empowers its community.

“Buying food locally provides jobs for the farmers; those farmers are then spending money in the same community,” she explains. “When you support local food, you’re supporting a very healthy cycle that boosts the local economy.”

Over time, Truly Living Well has built up a sustainable model by training new growers who are similarly passionate about community health.



Truly Living Wells College Town Farm
(PHOTO: NOAH CHEN)

As for Nuri? He’s confident that the work he has done has taken hold in the culture of Atlanta.

“It’s no longer a movement; we created a local food economy,” Nuri says. “Urban agriculture and small farms are the way of the future.”

Content with the state of Truly Living Well and urban farming in Atlanta, Nuri is currently finishing up a memoir and will continue to work in agriculture via his new venture, The Nuri Group, which does similar work, only on a larger scale. “I have been asked to assist folks in food planning for cities, doing studies, basically all the work I have been involved in,” he says.

“Tell people to keep growing!” said Nuri before signing off. “Eat healthily. Love one another. That’ll make the world a better place.”