

Harvest Dinner celebrates local food, community

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Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “The Earth laughs in flowers.”

That may be his opinion, but those who attended the 8th Annual SEEDS (South Eastern Efforts Developing Sustainable Spaces) Harvest Dinner last week prefer to think the Earth laughs in local food.



Keynote speaker Andrea Reusing, chef and owner of Lantern in Chapel Hill, addresses guests at the SEEDS Harvest Dinner. Reusing stressed the importance of supporting local food providers. (Staff photo by Laney Tipton)

Last Thursday, just over 200 people filled the bottom of Bay 7 at American Tobacco Campus to celebrate community and local food.

The celebration of sustainability highlighted local Triangle food and farming, as well as the efforts and educational programs of [SEEDS](#).

“I’ve been a supporter of SEEDS since I moved to Durham 10 years ago,” said Alice Alexander, director of development for the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. “I was smitten from the beginning.”

SEEDS was founded in 1994 by Brenda Brodie and Annice Kenan, who shared a vision for changing neighborhoods and lives through gardening. The Harvest Banquet, focused on local food and sustainability, showed how the SEEDS vision of education about local food and tie together a community through agriculture has become a reality.

“I admire what I see there,” said Dave Fruchtenicht who lives in Durham and provides beehives to SEEDS to help pollinate community gardens. “The people who work with those kids are doing important work. It expands their vision of what is possible and they’re using agriculture to really teach kids things and skills in relating to other people.

Guests enjoyed a local farm dinner prepared by Amy Tornquist of [Sage & Swift](#) Catering and Watts Grocery. Local businesses [West End Wine Bar](#), [Fullsteam Brewery](#), [Eastern Carolina Organics](#) and [Counter Culture Coffee](#) also contributed to the fare.

“The emphasis and importance of local food was evidenced by the meal,” Fruchtenicht said.

The highlight of the evening was keynote speaker Andrea Reusing, the 2011 James Beard Best Chef winner in the Southeast, and chef and owner of Chapel Hill’s award-winning restaurant, Lantern.

Reusing’s speech focused on the importance of local food, and the community’s role in making sure that was a resource they got to keep at their disposal. Reusing called the audience to action by telling them that for there to be more opportunities to eat local food, they must demand it.

The event also served as an introduction of Emily Egge, the new Executive Director for SEEDS, who says she believes sustainability and local foods are things everyone should have on his or her agenda.

“Overall, the issues that SEEDS addresses through progress, through advocacy and through just being here aren’t issues that are unique to one segment in our population,” Egge said. “They cross any social, cultural, racial or economic barriers. We all feel it in a different way, but its still coming from those same root issues.”

Guests had a positive response to Egge, and Alexander said she was excited to see what steps Egge would take to keep SEEDS growing and fostering the community.

“It’s just a wonderful community resource, and it’s so important to have a strong executive director,” Alexander said. “That can make or break an organization, but I think she’s doing a fantastic job.”

Guests included SEEDS sponsors, participants and staff, and many local people who support the work SEEDS does, as well as sustainability and local food initiatives.

Kelly Strickland, who works in Durham and serves as a community gardener for SEEDS with her husband, Ian, said they are happy to see such a good turnout and support for SEEDS.

“I hope people already supporting SEEDS are refreshed in knowing they’re supporting something that really matters to Durham,” Strickland said.