

# SEEDS Harvest Dinner a community celebration

[jock](#) September 19, 2012 | [Leave a response](#)

**By Hayley Paytes**

UNC Co-Editor

The Durham VOICE

thedurhamvoice@gmail.com

On Sept. 13, a Durham nonprofit celebrated Thanksgiving a little early.

[SEEDS NC](#) hosted its 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Harvest Dinner at The Pavilion at Durham Central Park. The organization, Southeastern Efforts to Develop Sustainable Spaces, seeks to educate and improve the community through gardening.



(From left to right) Deborah Yakubs, Matt Kopac, holding baby Evan, and Sarah Cottingham socialize at SEEDS' 9th Annual Harvest Dinner. (Staff photo by Hayley Paytes)

The dinner is the organization's largest fundraiser of the year and typically raises between \$10,000 and \$20,000 for the organization, said Brenda Brodie, SEEDS founder.

But beyond being a fundraiser, the dinner is a celebration of community, Executive Director Emily Egge said.

"The harvest dinner is an opportunity to share a meal and break bread with our whole community – the people who participate in our programs, the people that lead us, the supporters that help to fund us and everyone who is interested in making sure there is beautiful green space," Egge said.

Around 240 people attended the event, which featured food from local restaurants and a live band. More than a dozen sponsors helped alleviate the cost of the event, which was held next to the Garden of Eatin'.

Event attendee Norman Budnitz, who works with [Four Leaf Farms](#), said he decided to go because he believes in the work SEEDS does with local children.

"I just love the whole idea of giving these kids something to strive for," he said. "They learn valuable skills through gardening."

Egge attributed the event's success to the community, which has rallied behind SEEDS since it started in 1994.

"I think that we are fortunate to live in a community where people recognize the connection between being good stewards of the world around us and with building community," she said. "The programs we run here have taken off because people understand their importance."

The nonprofit hopes to continue growing in the year to come. At the dinner, Egge revealed plans to renovate the [SEEDS building on Gilbert Street](#) in Durham to make it a better teaching space.



A group of vendors chats at SEEDS' 9th Annual Harvest Dinner. (From left to right) Graham Cox, Amanda Shapiro, Ben Filippo, Lee Miller and Ali Rudel. (Photo by Hayley Paytes)

Egge said SEEDS plans to launch a capital campaign in October to fund the project.

In addition to having seven community gardens, the nonprofit also offers classes to educate local residents about the importance of healthy eating habits.

Community Gardener Michelle Lotker said she volunteers with SEEDS because of the community ties it forges both inside and outside the garden.

A 2008 Duke alumnae, Lotker said she has seen the nonprofit grow tremendously in the last five years and that she feels lucky to be a part of it.

“I really like growing things in general,” she said. “I like the work they do with youth. They just do great work.”

Twenty years ago, Brodie said, she couldn't have imagined the growth of SEEDS. She said her favorite part of the event was to see the unveiling of the architectural plans for the renovated space.

“When I started SEEDS, people had fled the farms,” she said. “They were all inside at their computers.”

The plans are an affirmation of the nonprofit's success, she said, and the renovated space will enable SEEDS to reach – and help – more people.

“Gardens are healing places,” she said. “People make life changes. ... It is like skipping a rock in a pond. You get a ripple effect.”