



MEDIA RELEASE

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Town partners with local farm to assist in job training for special needs adults

Look around town on any given day and you may spot crews donning Town of Zionsville baseball hats and orange vests working on any number of maintenance, repair and upkeep projects.

But these crews are not comprised of Town of Zionsville employees. The group includes a team leader and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities employed by local farm and non-profit, Watch Us Farm.

Zionsville-based Watch Us Farm has a simple mission: to provide adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities the opportunity to live, learn and work on a community-integrated farm. With limited options for special needs adults after high school, Watch Us Farm provides a safe and nurturing environment while helping members develop individualized job skills.

Job training opportunities on the farm include helping grow organic produce, sweeping the barn, cleaning the pastures, weeding and caring for grass-fed organic livestock. The members also help clear, set lines and plant seeds in the farm's pumpkin field.

Last fall, Watch Us Farm Executive Director and Co-Founder Janice Agarwal and Founder David Agarwal approached Mayor Haak with an idea: as Watch Us Farm members continue to expand their knowledge and skills on the farm, hire these individuals as Town volunteers and assist them in finding projects aimed at beautifying Zionsville.

"As we were starting our non-profit corporation, we met with the Town to let everyone know we would soon be up and running," said Janice. "After we described our farm and our goals for future development within Zionsville, we found the Town excited, enthusiastically supportive and extremely helpful."

Since meeting, Watch Us Farm team members have worked with Town Department Heads to come up with short-term, volunteer-based projects. In meeting with Zionsville Parks & Recreation Superintendent Matt Dickey, Watch Us Farm clients learned the process of collecting sticks and removing silt that appears after large storms as well as sanding, priming and painting. "Team Sam," made of up team leader Sam Agarwal and worker Alex Gillihan, has completed repainting the guardrails on the Mulberry Street overpass over the Big-4 Rail Trail.

Each Watch Us Farm crew includes one team leader and one to three adult workers with special needs.

“Before each work day, I review the work schedule with the team leaders and run through the steps needed to make each project successful,” Agarwal said. “With the help of our intern Rachel Cundiff, I am putting together a ‘how-to’ manual for each step in the project so that future team leaders can quickly learn how to help each worker develop the skills needed to complete a job.”

In working with the Town, Agarwal hopes to help her clients learn new skills and to also show the community how the abilities of special needs adults can make a local impact.

“Our goals include training our adults with special needs, showing our community how capable we are and looking for future projects as we all work and grow together,” Agarwal said.

In addition to the Town of Zionsville Parks & Recreation Department, the Street & Stormwater Department and Department of Planning & Economic Development also have plans to work with Watch Us Farm on future Town initiatives including curb and path maintenance and repairs.

“When the Agarwals approached us with their idea to partner with the Town on job training opportunities, this was a no-brainer for us,” Mayor Haak said. “Through this partnership, we hope to work with the Agarwals to provide Watch Us Farm team members with new skills that will enable them to find meaningful job opportunities in the future. I look forward to expanding our relationship in the coming years and contributing to their positive business model.”

For more information of Watch Us Farm, visit: www.watchusfarm.com.

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