



The day's pickings, with (L-R) Mary Louie, PA co-president, and CSA organizers Claudia Brown, Trisha Elliot and Loren Luzmore

Community Supported Agriculture Takes Root at Calhoun

A Parents Association initiative creates a community-wide opportunity that combines nutrition, education and social activism.

By Heather Sasaki-Parker

Each Tuesday this past fall, more than 50 Calhoun families, faculty and staff gathered on the plaza at 81st Street with their own reusable shopping bags in hand, to collect a weekly allotment of produce. The scene became a bustling community village square, where baskets full of fresh fruits and vegetables were stacked high. Here, the produce was still enveloped by the warmth of the soil. There were baskets of crispy collard greens picked a few hours earlier, freshly cut Brussels sprouts still on their stems, white turnips and red radishes waiting to be eaten.

Welcome to Calhoun's new CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) food co-op, initiated by parent organizers Loren Luzmore, Claudia Brown and Trish Elliott, with administrative support from Sylvia Kopec and the enthusiastic sponsorship of the Parents Association. The project is a partnership between

Paisley Farm in upstate New York, which also supplies fresh produce to many Manhattan restaurants, and members of the Calhoun community, who signed up last summer to buy fresh seasonal food directly from this local farmer.

One Tuesday at the plaza, kindergarten volunteer Lucas Link was practicing the names of the vegetables with his mom while waiting for his first customer. At the earliest opportunity, he showed his big smile and enthusiastically explained what the week's offerings were; Lucas was especially proud of himself for getting his tongue around the word *arugula*. He then happily filled the person's reusable bag. "He is in hog heaven right now," said Maria Link, attesting to how much her son enjoyed volunteering for the CSA. Shortly thereafter, Upper School senior Lauren Capkanis arrived at the plaza and shared her thoughts about the CSA while select-

ing her fresh produce for her mom. "I love it," she said. "Everything is so tasty because it's all freshly picked—especially the collard greens." While members of the community continued to collect their share of produce, you could hear cheerful conversations describing the dishes made with the rapini they had obtained the prior week. Others shared recipes – some supplied by the farmer, some by Chef Bobo and staff, and others by the CSA organizers.

"It's been a win-win situation for all," confirms co-organizer Claudia Brown. The community receives a reliable source of fresh seasonal produce while getting exposed to new types of vegetables and recipes for those vegetables. Also, members of the community develop a relationship with the farmer who grows their food, gaining a closer connection to the food source. In return, the farmer receives reliable support for



his business and the opportunity to market his food earlier in the season, which helps cash flow and enables him to sustain his farm, pay employees and maintain equipment. Overall, the partnership alleviates some of the economic stress common to local farmers.

In addition to the immediate benefits to CSA members and the farmer, Loren Luzmore points out that CSA is already benefiting the wider school community; the CSA's weekly "leftovers" are donated to the 81st Street kitchen. She and fellow CSA organizers are also working with faculty to develop an educational component. This past fall, Loren (who is a certified holistic health counselor) was invited to Calhoun's fourth grade health classes to teach nutrition; her six-part program included the introduction of new, healthy foods through taste tests. CSA organizers are also working with Andrew Hume, Special Projects Director, to develop a

curriculum that would bring the farmers to Calhoun to work with students and, alternately, send students up to learn at the farm. Loren notes that her son Andrew, a senior, is working on an independent Masterworks project to help develop the curriculum for students who go to the farm. Topics could include composting or farming techniques that might apply to the school's new third-floor greenhouse and the Green Roof. "It would be great to have symmetry between the farm upstate and the agricultural venues we have here at school," says Loren.

The CSA may have begun as an experiment, but, according to Claudia, it's been 100 percent successful. "It's almost an embarrassment of riches," she says. "Every one of our shareholders would like to rejoin next season, but we intend to open it up to the whole Calhoun community again." The organizers are

trying to figure out an equitable way to award memberships to interested members of the Calhoun community; a lottery is being contemplated, and split shares will be encouraged.

Mary Louie, PA co-president and a huge cheerleader for the CSA project, isn't worried about the organizational dilemma because the benefits have been so overwhelmingly positive. "The CSA has been a great opportunity to integrate all divisions of the school and to meet parents and staff who share a common goal, appreciating fresh, local produce."

For more information about Calhoun's CSA, go to www.calhoun.org/csa.

Heather Sasaki-Parker is a parent of two Calhoun students and co-chair of Calhoun Community in Action (CCA), a committee of the Parents Association.