

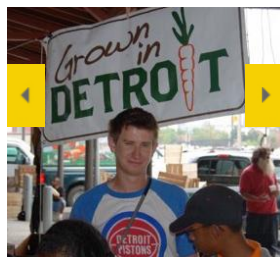


Deere Co-Sponsors Lawyer Helping Detroit's Urban Farmers

By Corporate Communications

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April 07, 2015



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Nick Leonard, an attorney sponsored by John Deere and two law firms, helps urban farmers with legal needs in Detroit, Michigan.

Attorney Nick Leonard says his clients are tired of seeing abandoned properties and crime in their neighborhoods.

So they're reclaiming the land through urban farming, and John Deere is helping them with legal services.

Deere is one of three sponsors of a two-year law fellowship for Leonard, who provides legal services to Detroit's urban farmers who might not be able to afford a lawyer. His services include guiding farmers through the city's new zoning regulations as they work together to

help revitalize the city and bring local fresh food options to residents, he said.

"This is my dream job," Leonard said. "This is what I've always wanted to do, to help make the city more healthy and livable."

Leonard is on assignment through an Equal Justice Works fellowship, sponsored by Deere and law firms Schiff Hardin and Lane & Waterman. He's working at the Great Lakes Environmental Law Center, which he said is the only non-profit environmental legal service agency in Detroit.

Massive job loss in the city has led to population decline over the past decade. Abandoned properties now account for about 30% of the land within city limits, Leonard said.

That's led to higher crime rates and lower property values than before the economic downturn, he said.

"All of this has left a massive debt for the city," he said. "It's not uncommon to see entire city blocks vacant; empty; no structures, period."

The farms "provide empowering space" for neighbors who want to take back their communities and raise property values, he said. In areas where grocers are scarce, the farms are sources of fresh, local food at affordable prices, he added.

In 2013, Detroit began zoning some land for urban farm use. Leonard hopes the city goes a step further and eventually offers incentives for those who plant crops on blighted properties, he said.

More than 1,300 farms are now registered in the Detroit Agricultural Network, and Leonard expects the list to continue growing.

"It's a grassroots field that's just now being put into a legal platform," he said. "They're just starting to think about employment laws, non-profit versus for-profit business, and what the city's role might be."

Deere's role in this work is an example of in-kind pro bono legal work that Deere supports globally, said Mary Jones, senior vice president and general counsel for Deere. The company partners with agencies to help those who can't otherwise afford or obtain legal assistance, she said.

This is the third year Deere has sponsored the Equal Justice Works fellowship, thanks to a partnership between the John Deere Global Legal Services Group and the John Deere Foundation, said Mara Sovey, director of corporate citizenship and president of the foundation.

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"This work aligns with other projects the John Deere Foundation is undertaking," Sovey said. "We aim to improve socioeconomic conditions in Deere communities across the globe. We can learn a lot about economic development from this, and we hope to apply what we learn in a number of our Deere communities."

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By C Nathan Clark | 09-Apr-2015

SUBMIT



This is a great story which gives some insight to what John Deere does to help with agriculture on a smaller scale also. This will also help to bring a city back to life after the devastation. It will open up job opportunities also.

By Debra Twyford | 09-Apr-2015 | [Report this comment](#)



I'm so proud to see Deere working to become part of the solution in Detroit.

By Jennifer O'Neill | 09-Apr-2015 | [Report this comment](#)



Excellent initiative. With more of the world's population living in Cities, it must be a good opportunity for Deere to consider more such support initiatives in urban farming.

By Andrew Jackson | 09-Apr-2015 | [Report this comment](#)



I am so proud that Deere is part of helping Detroit bloom again. This triggered a memory regarding a movie on the subject. Turns out there are two, Grown in Detroit and Urban Roots.

By Sarah Hartnell | 08-Apr-2015 | [Report this comment](#)



This is a fantastic way to impact our inner-cities. Thank you for supporting this effort!

By Anthony Llano | 08-Apr-2015 | [Report this comment](#)



Great action to make Detroit better!

By Hui Li | 07-Apr-2015 | [Report this comment](#)



Pumped to see Deere involved with Urban Farming, I've found many in the company are unfamiliar with the concept. Very sustainable and life giving to the local community.

By William Kingsolver | 07-Apr-2015 | [Report this comment](#)



So glad to see this story! As a Michigan native who would love to see Detroit thrive again, I appreciate Deere's support of urban agriculture there.

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Also a Detroit native - this is great to see!

By Rebecca Berkhimer | 07-Apr-2015 | [Report this comment](#)



As a former Detroit boy, this is great news..... thank you John Deere

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What a great way to make a positive impact on the community.

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This is great. As a Detroit transplant, I can attest to the neighborhood decline that has plagued the city. But it's projects and collaborations like this that help bring neighborhoods together and improve the community. There is a powerful force in place to change Detroit's economic position and its good to see that John Deere is part of the rebirth.

By Tharlyn Fox | 07-Apr-2015 | Report this comment



Great story, it is wonderful to learn that Deere has a part in helping the city of Detroit. This can be a model for other inner cities where access to fresh affordable produce is scarce. It is so grat that Nick has this opportunity to pursue his passion.

By Lynn Toney | 07-Apr-2015 | Report this comment

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