



PEOPLE SHAPING TOMORROW



Revitalizing the Lower Ninth Ward through Re-igniting AgriCulture in the Community

NAME: JENGA MWENDO

LOCATION: NEW ORLEANS, LA

ORGANIZATION: [BACKYARD GARDENERS NETWORK](#)

The Lower Ninth Ward has a rich agricultural history. Many older residents can recall a time when fruit trees grew throughout the neighborhood and nearly everyone had backyard gardens. Today, as is common throughout the country, most people do not grow their own food and rely on supermarkets. But in the Lower Ninth Ward, there is no supermarket, and the neighborhood-to-supermarket distance is nearly double the New Orleans average. There is also a growing fear that the recent oil spill in the Gulf will have long-term affects on the food system.

Jenga Mwendo was like many, sitting on the sideline of the environmental movement, imagining what could be but not putting much effort towards making it happen. The birth of her daughter in 2004 and the devastation of her birth neighborhood by levee breach during hurricane Katrina the following year changed her forever, inspiring her to make a difference in her community and the world. Instead of remaining on the sidelines (working in the computer animation industry in New York), Jenga decided to take action. In 2007, she returned home to the Lower Ninth Ward, and began transforming her wrecked neighborhood into a vibrant, healthy, sustainable environment. Since then, Jenga has revitalized a community garden, planted over 150 free trees for residents, secured fruit trees for three community sites, led the charge to turn an empty lot into a vibrant green space, and founded an urban gardening organization called the Backyard Gardener's Network. And she's just getting started.

Jenga's vision is a thriving, close-knit community of growers in the Lower Ninth Ward and beyond; communities in which anyone interested in gardening feels encouraged, empowered and supported to produce food for self, family and the larger

community. This vision inspired her *TogetherGreen* Conservation Action Project: Re-igniting AgriCulture in the Lower Ninth Ward. The project will engage residents in urban agriculture, reintegrating it into cultural norms. Building on her current work with the Backyard Gardener's Network, she will work closely with New Orleans Food and Farm Network, which will provide support and sponsorship.

Jenga is working to create a community where skilled horticulturalists teach new gardeners, where elderly and youth exchange stories and knowledge, and where neighbors come together to support one another. It's a simple vision, but one that requires a lot of hard work. We think Jenga is up to the challenge.