

Spirituality in Action

Brown and Yellow Make Green (Jobs)

Pittsburghers don't have to drive to the country to see fields awash in brilliant flowers—they can drive by a former steel-making site along the Monongahela River. It's slated for redevelopment, but until builders and public officials arrive with their ribboned shovels, it's a sunflower garden. In the nearby neighborhood of East Liberty, bright yellow canola flowers decorate once-derelict lots.

Sunflower and canola are biofuel feedstocks: crops used to make clean, renewable alternatives to fossil fuels. Until recently, no one had thought to cultivate them on urban brownfields and other blighted properties. Now, the idea hatched by graduate students at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University is taking seed in New Orleans and other cities grappling with diminished populations and increased property vacancies.

Several city blocks of feedstock crops aren't producing a great deal of biofuel, but that's beside the

point, says Andrew Butcher, who heads Growth Through Energy and Community Health

(GTECH), a nonprofit

born of the Carnegie Mel-

lon thesis project. The

gardens improve soil quality, land values,

and morale in economically distressed

communities. And the young people

who tend them gain experience in the

growing green sector.

"We're connecting them to emerging opportuni-

ties that they may or may

not know about," Butcher says.

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