



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Southside Blooms' flower farm grows from MWRD compost

Sunflowers are now soaring nearly eight feet into the air under the Green Line tracks in the Washington Park neighborhood from the benefit of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago's (MWRD's) EQ Compost.

Southside Blooms and partners unveiled the new flower farm during a ribbon cutting event on Aug. 26, culminating a few months of hard work of planting and collaboration to create flowers, steady jobs and a continuous source of revenue from the prospective sale of the flowers.

MWRD President Kari K. Steele, Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet and Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos were on hand to unveil the site with Southside Blooms President Quilen Blackwell and project partners from Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative, South East Chicago Commission, the Office of Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton's Justice, Equity, and Opportunity Initiative, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and Illinois Department of Agriculture.

"Our compost can restore soil and promote urban farming, and as a result, increase flower production, reduce food deserts, improve the regional ecosystem, promote changes in our economy and land use, and potentially improve Cook County by revitalizing communities—and that is exactly what Southside Blooms represents," said President Kari K. Steele.

The MWRD delivered 278 tons, or 21 truckloads, of the EQ (Exceptional Quality) Compost to nurture the soil for the site at 5211 S. Prairie Ave., which includes 27 flower beds that are 100 feet long and four feet wide. Southside Blooms began creating the site in May, planted in June and by July the flowers were in bloom. Irrigation is powered through a solar panel installation



MWRD President Kari K. Steele and Southside Blooms President Quilen Blackwell formally cut the ribbon on a new flower farm in the Washington Park neighborhood. Looking on from left is MWRD Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos, MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet, Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative President and CEO Ghian Foreman, South East Chicago Commission Executive Director Diane Burnham, and Yaacov Delaney, program coordinator for the Justice, Equity and Opportunity Initiative at the Office of Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton.

and rainwater harvesting system. In addition to brightening the community, the flower farm provides sustainable employment for at-risk youth.

Southside Blooms is a project of Chicago Eco House, a 501c3 nonprofit with a mission of using sustainability to alleviate poverty. Every flower purchased from Southside Blooms not only creates jobs for at-risk youth, but the organization also converts vacant lots into safe and productive community assets, and actively contributes to the health and resilience of the environment through regenerative farming practices.

"Southside Blooms is grateful for our partnership with MWRD! If not for their free high quality compost, this project wouldn't have been financially feasible for us," said Southside Blooms President Quilen Blackwell.

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Southside Blooms' flower farm grows from MWRD compost, *cont.*

The MWRD's EQ Compost is a sustainable product that is both beneficial to the environment and free to the public. The MWRD partners with the city of Chicago tree trimming program and other suppliers to produce the compost with the biosolids from the wastewater treatment process. By using this exceptional quality product, the MWRD can improve soil structure, supply organic matter and allow plants to more effectively utilize nutrients and soil to retain more water.

"The sunflowers are grown without the use of pesticides, herbicides or synthetic fertilizers, and every flower purchased from this flower farm contributes to job creation for at-risk youth," said Commissioner Du Buclet. "On top of that, these flowers look amazing."

To learn more or purchase flowers or other products, visit southsideblooms.com. For more information about EQ Compost, visit mwrld.org/eq-compost.

To view remarks and highlights from the ribbon cutting event on Aug. 26, visit the [MWRD's YouTube channel](#).



Sunflowers are sprouting up on the 5200 block of South Prairie Avenue to beautify the community and provide jobs and a steady stream of revenue

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrld.org.