



# VASUDHA

FALL 2015

NEWSLETTER

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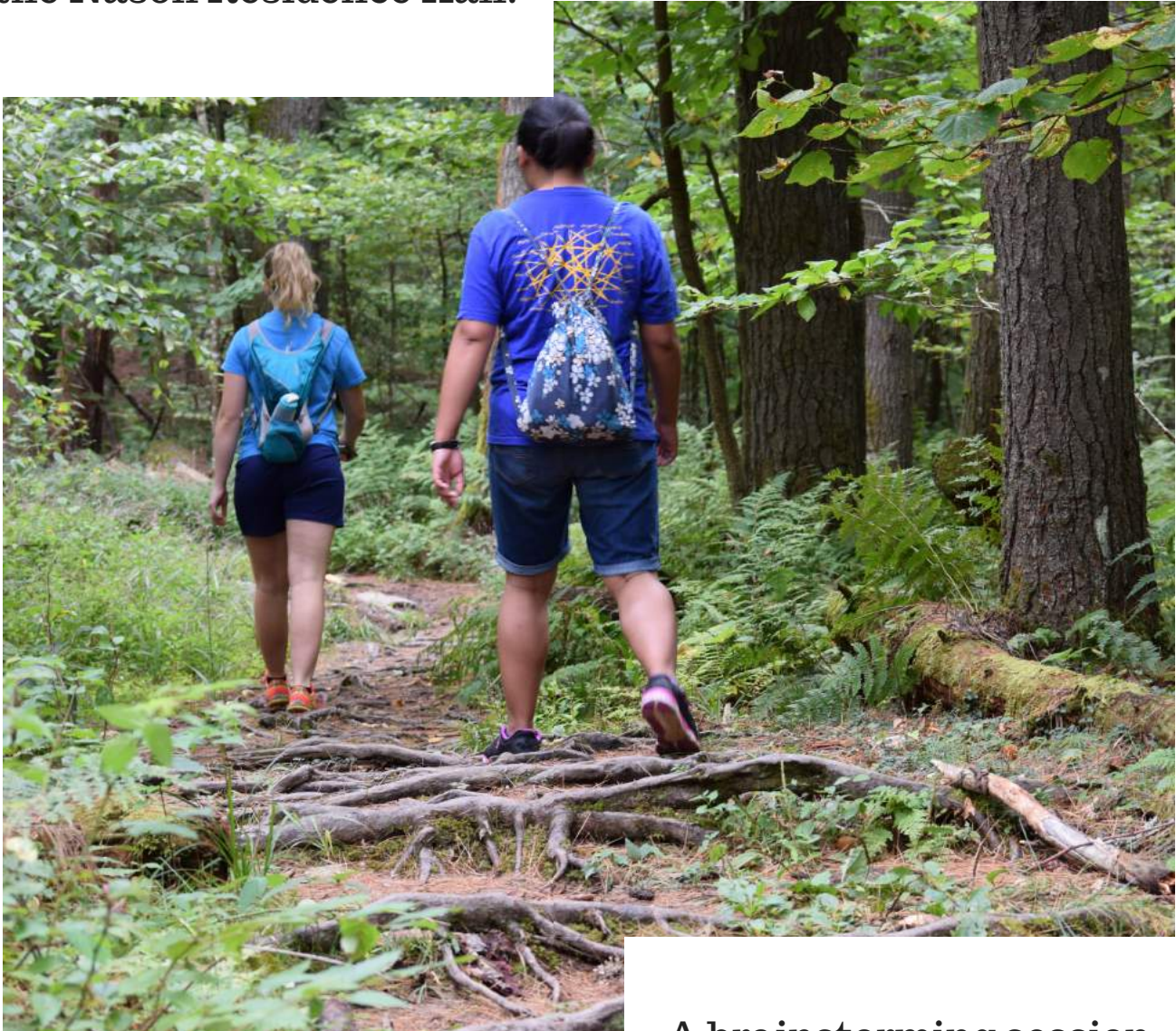
This past Fall, Vasudha hosted numerous workshops focused on designing and creating a more sustainable environment in and around our physical community space in Nason Hall.



We started off the semester with our annual Fall retreat to Lake George. This year a group of 10 first-years and 2 returning Vasudha members went up to the Darrin Freshwater Institute for a weekend of bonding and enjoying nature. On the second day of the trip, the group split into a canoeing and hiking group. The water was warm enough to swim in and the air was cool and fresh for a wonderful hike. After a refreshing weekend outdoors, the students returned to RPI ready to take on the semester.



Our first workshop was a design-planning think tank lead by Scott Kellogg, the Fall Vasudha Teaching and Learning Assistant. Drawing upon his work at the Radix Ecological Sustainability Center and the Rhizome Collective in Austin, Texas, Scott presented ideas for small scale sustainable systems that could be integrated into the Nason Residence Hall.



A brainstorming session produced an impressive list of options, with the group choosing to construct raised garden beds and to try their hand at mushroom cultivation.



The first hands-on activity we undertook was the cultivation of edible mushrooms. Students learned the basics of fungal biology and its potential for ecologically regenerative applications.



To cultivate oyster mushrooms, mycelium was sprinkled on damp corrugated cardboard, rolled up and mixed with collected coffee grounds from a local cafe. They were then placed into 10 gallon paint buckets with holes drilled in them for draining, and left to gestate for 4-5 weeks.

Students also created shitake logs - a method for growing shitake mushrooms by drilling a series of holes into 10" logs, filling the holes with a shitake culture, and sealing them with a soy based wax to prevent moisture from activating the culture. It will take 6-8 months for the mushrooms to grow in a damp and dark location once the shitake culture has been 'shocked' out of dormancy by the addition of water.

The oyster mushrooms in the buckets have a 4-6 week growing cycle, so we placed them in the Vasudha lounge to grow. The first harvest of fully grown oyster mushrooms was in early November.



Our second hands-on workshop, featured local gardener, Peg Aloï, who introduced to us by Professor Akera during last year's end-of-year celebration. This quick workshop served to plant “living time capsules” which will return in flowering form during springtime.



Tulip and daffodil bulbs were planted next to the garden beds adjacent to the Nason Patio. This was the start of creating more contact with locals in Troy in order to have more collaborative workshops and Vasudha-hosted events.



Vasudha also partnered with Terra Cafe to screen the movie "Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret." This collaboration intends to screen food security and food justice related films as well as open discussions afterwards to raise awareness about what and how we consume food and the choices we make around food. We hope to continue our partnership with Terra Cafe in upcoming semesters and continue such public dialogue sessions.





After a long awaited approval from Facilities and Grounds, the Vasudha Community was given approval to construct raised garden beds on the south side of Nason Hall. The beds were made from rot resistant locally milled hemlock, and were filled with garden soil from a local dairy operation.







Mini-greenhouse covers were installed over each bed, incorporating a "flip-top" design that will facilitate access to the beds. This was a successful hands-on workshop as we had over 20 attendees helping to fill the beds with soil and assemble the flip tops. Mache, a cold hardy green, was planted in each bed and should be harvestable by Spring!



After attending multiple monthly Oakwood Soul Café Dinners, we were invited to visit Sheree at Bonehead Farm to help with her late fall harvest, and to prepare her squash beds for spring. Sheree is an active small farmer and attends many Troy community events. Students had a fantastic time harvesting carrots, beets, watermelon radishes, leeks, and cabbages as well as prepping the beds with compost.



Sheree's hospitality in showing us around her farm was a unique and educational experience. She shared valuable knowledge about small farming and even let the students take some of the harvested food to cook with! Vasudha hopes to continue to partner with local Troy Community members in upcoming events.





Vasudha hosted its second annual Thanksgiving Dinner before the break, and had over 75 attendees join the festivities. There was a fantastic spread, prepared by the Vasudha students and alumni, with the only cost of attendance being “Bring your own plates and utensils!” to cut down on plastic waste.

A group of us went to the Farmer’s Market the week prior to purchase ingredients to be featured in the meal. From a spicy kale pesto salad to vegan pumpkin pie, our stomachs were stuffed with Thanksgiving delights.

We also held a fish-naming contest to name the two fish which now live in a functioning aquaponics system, located in the Vasudha Lounge. This system was implemented by students in the RPI STEP program, facilitated by Professor Greinstaff and Sean Wilson, now RPI graduate. There are two fish and two basil plants happily living in the space, and have democratically been given the names “Natalie Yap” and “Yatalie Nap”.





With the semester coming to a close, we hosted one final workshop, titled “DIY Cleaning Solutions”. Arie Heim, a Senior Science, Technology, and Society undergraduate student at RPI, led the workshop. Arie is an advocate for using and making eco-friendly products, especially since conventional cleaning products that can be corrosive and unpleasant to use.

The purpose of creating our own cleaning solution was to reduce costs in cleaning supplies needed for fixing up the space in the 87 Gym, now been dubbed the new Environmental Education Center. Ecologic, RPI’s oldest environmental student-run group, is in charge of maintaining the space, with a goal to refurbish and utilize the space as the hub for all environmental organizations on campus, including Vasudha.

Since many Vasudha residents become environmental leaders later on in their academic and professional careers, the new Environmental Education Center will be utilized for futhering environmental collaborations on campus, and serve as the next step in the growth of a sustainable network of enviornmentally concerned students.

