

A decade with DIG

Latasha McMillan reflects on her 10 years of gardening

By Parth Shah

Every afternoon, Latasha McMillan strolls into the walk-in pantry at the SEEDS — South Eastern Efforts Developing Sustainable Spaces — warehouse and reaches into a cardboard box full of teabags.

“I’m on a mint kick right now,” McMillan said.

For the 10-year veteran of the SEEDS-run DIG, Durham Inner-city Gardeners, program, the SEEDS warehouse is a home away from home.

“Let’s say SEEDS is like a fridge and I’m a magnet,” McMillan said.

McMillan’s involvement with SEEDS, a Durham non profit community gardening organization, started at a job fair when McMillan was only 14 years old. A youth educator at SEEDS named Thaddeus Bennett — Mr. Thad — was looking for someone for a week of work.

Mr. Thad said McMillan was far more professional than her peers. “All the other students just came up to the table and it was like a joke to them,” Mr. Thad said. “But Latasha really wanted the job. She shook my hand and we had a great conversation.”

Mr. Thad said McMillan was the perfect candidate for the job – so much so that he spent almost two months after the fair searching for her instead of hiring another student.

“I was in the process of moving at the time so they couldn’t get in



Latasha McMillan thinks back on her earliest experiences at SEEDS and how the organization has helped her grow. (Staff Photo by Parth Shah)

touch with me,” McMillan said.

“I thought I didn’t get the job because I hadn’t heard back.”

McMillan was offered a weeklong camp counseling position taking care of younger students.

“After the week was over I stayed on as a volunteer because the atmosphere was so beautiful,” McMillan said.

McMillan learned about the DIG program while volunteering. DIG gets local youth involved with urban gardening and teaches them the importance of eating fresh, healthy food. McMillan said the mission of the program really stuck with her.

“Fourteen-year-old Latasha was so enthusiastic and so passionate,” McMillan said. “The information was refreshing so I took it very seriously. You understand that you put something in the ground and it grows, but there’s a respect level and process most people don’t realize ... It was a very self-awakening experience.”

After a year with DIG, McMillan was hired as a full-time employee.

“The next summer, at age 15, I was able to hire somebody my age,” McMillan said. “It was very empowering. You don’t experience this kind of stuff until you’re an adult.”

Volunteering with SEEDS has helped McMillan hone her leadership skills and has given her the chance to work with her favorite kind of people: kids.

“(Young people) have this thing I call Superman syndrome,” McMillan said. “Where everyone is the hero. They have this ability to forgive so beautifully and be more accepting, which is something I think is lost the older we get.”

McMillan’s forged strong relationships with many of the young people at SEEDS, like 19-year-old Nilisha McPaul.

“She’s like a sister to me,” McPaul said. “Latasha will help you without hesitation. If you need something, she will always make time out of her schedule.”