

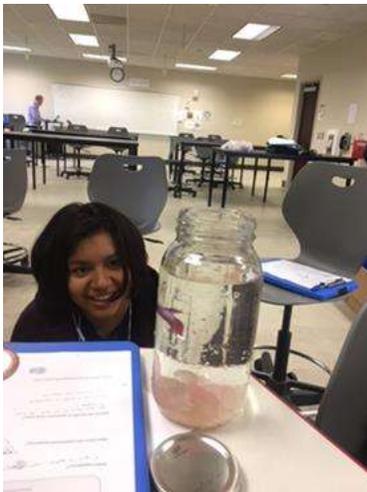
## **Lehigh County Conservation District College Scholarship Awarded to Agri-Business Student from Allentown, PA**

Lehigh County Conservation District (LCCD) Board of Directors is pleased to have recently awarded a \$2000 College Scholarship to Building 21 High School Senior, Marilyn Reyes. This award is made available annually to all Lehigh County graduating seniors pursuing a degree in conservation or environmental sciences at a college or university within the Commonwealth. Marilyn has been accepted into Penn State Lehigh Valley and will be the first female student from Allentown (in recent history) to enroll in the Agri-Business Program.



Marilyn's interest in agriculture began in 2018, when she participated in an Urban Agriculture course offered at Building 21 High School by LCCD. The program, called "Conservation 101 Urban Agriculture Field Experience Education" has been designed by LCCD with generous grant support from the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Dorothy Rider-Pool Foundation and the Harry C. Trexler Trust. The semester-long class taught by LCCD educators and conservation specialists educates about sustainability and utilizing best management practices to carry out traditional and new urban agriculture techniques.

Marilyn worked hard throughout her time in LCCD's Urban Agriculture class. Always taking lead roles in the course projects, she built vertical planters, harvested microgreens, took the lead role in designing the class rain barrel, maintained a worm composting bin and returned during summer break to care for and harvest the raised bed garden she planted in late spring.



Her decision to pursue Agri-Business at PSU also took root during several of the Urban Agriculture field trips LCCD hosted during her semester. On a trip to the Steelton High School Aquaponics lab (outside of Harrisburg) she helped harvest cacao beans from a tree grown in the school's aquaponics lab. She fondly recalled doing something similar as a child on her grandfather's cacao farm in Ecuador. At Heidel Hollow Farm in Lehigh County she was positively

impacted by a high tunnel flower house. She remembers discussing with classmates, that the change of scenery at this farm had a calming effect on her mood that particular day. At that point she began exploring ideas to combine agriculture and growing with mental health therapy.

Throughout her junior and senior year, Marilyn sought extracurricular activities to strengthen her experiences in urban agriculture. She became a Youth Leader for LCCD's Traveling Watershed Festival program and served as a key instructor for four festival events. She also joined Lehigh Valley Health Networks summer high school intern program. While working for the sustainability department there she developed a concept raised bed garden proposal for the hospital grounds. This was an idea she hoped could be implemented on campus to provide healthy food and a therapeutic space for patients, workers, and visiting friends and family. Finally, at a Penn State summer camp for high school entrepreneurs, she and her assigned team pitched her idea to begin an agri-therapy business and program for urban communities.

In May, Marilyn defended her Senior Capstone project pictured below at Building 21. The model she created included therapy building with doctor's offices outfitted with green walls. These living walls were meant to transport patients during their therapy sessions from their urban community to a more natural setting. Each room has a green wall and the top of the office has a green roof for BMP stormwater management. The green roof is also meant to be an agri-therapy classroom where patients can engage in growing projects for therapeutic purposes. Marilyn will be entering her freshman year at PSU in August of 2019 and plans to work toward making this non-profit business concept a reality.

During the three-semester pilot of this course, more than 20 community farmers, businesses and community partners have enhanced the program by providing meaningful real-world field experiences to participating students. LCCD is grateful to these community partners, our grantors, and for the partnership with the Allentown School District, all which allow for the provision of relevant conservation programming in Lehigh County. For more information about the "Conservation 101 Urban Agriculture Field Experience Education" curriculum, please contact Jolie Chylack: [jchylack@LehighCounty.org](mailto:jchylack@LehighCounty.org).

