



Jackie Joyner-Kersee Foundation Launches New Food Innovation Center

April 9 2022 7:15 AM





ST. LOUIS– The newly created Jackie Joyner-Kersee Food, Agriculture and Nutrition Innovation Center (JJK FAN) will host a kick-off ceremony, tour, and ribbon cutting on Monday, April 11 at 2:30 PM at the JJK Center, 101 Jackie Joyner Kersee Circle, East Saint Louis, Il 62204. The mission of the JJK FAN Center is to provide quality youth and community programs in STEAM+Ag, food production, nutrition, and physical activity in East St. Louis and beyond. The JJK FAN Center is a unique public-private partnership between the Jackie Joyner-Kersee Foundation, the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and University of Illinois Extension.

The JJK Foundation recently acquired a 12,000 ft² office facility through a generous donation from Landsdowne Up. This facility will be used to house JJK Foundation and JJK Winning in Life staff, the University of Illinois Extension Illinois Nutrition Education Program, and Danforth Center’s JJK FAN Center staff. Over time, the five-phase build-out will include indoor and outdoor urban agriculture demonstration sites, as well as space for youth and community members to engage in hands-on trainings and certification programs related to growing food, ag innovation, and nutrition for improving health and performance.

“Education and opening endless opportunities for youth in STEAM-Ag in East St. Louis is at the core of this collaboration. Even though we’re three individual organizations, we

sync and work as one,” said Olympic Gold Medalist and Founder & CEO of the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation, Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

The idea for the JJK FAN Innovation Center was inspired by Jackie Joyner-Kersey’s life experiences starting as a youth growing up in East St. Louis. Her out-of-the-classroom educational experiences helped her navigate her journey as both an Olympic athlete and community leader who now influences more than 200 youth in East St. Louis every day.

“Jackie Joyner-Kersey has spent her entire career demonstrating what you can achieve when you refuse to let others put limits on you,” said Robert J. Jones, Chancellor of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. “Illinois is proud to be a partner in the formation of the JJK FAN Innovation Center, which will create many new opportunities for young people in the East St. Louis community to lead their own lives of impact and inspiration.”

By providing youth and community members with avenues for personal and professional growth, the JJK FAN Innovation Center’s goal is to ignite economic empowerment and community development in the region. Through harnessing the expertise of community partners, this project will set the foundation for sustainably expanding youth engagement and community development in nutrition and local food systems within the city of East St. Louis. The JJK FAN vision is to become a nationally recognized innovation center that empowers youth and communities to grow through urban agriculture, food innovation, entrepreneurialism, and career readiness.

“The Danforth Center is proud to be part of this collaboration to support the agency of East St. Louis students to elevate their community through increased STEAM+Ag career pathways, food access, leadership and entrepreneurship,” said Dr. Kris Callis-Duehl, the Sally and Derick Driemeyer Director of Education Research and Outreach at the Danforth Center.

About the Organizations:

THE JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE FOUNDATION

Founded in 1988 by Olympian Jackie Joyner-Kersey, the JJK Foundation is an iconic organization with a mission to carry out Jackie’s dream to provide youth in East St. Louis the opportunity to win in life. The JJK Foundation’s theory of change is that youth can overcome obstacles and become successful through access to healthy lifestyles, quality educational opportunities, sports and recreation, and character and leadership development. The JJK Foundation serves as a portal through which the Greater East St. Louis community can thrive.

THE DONALD DANFORTH PLANT SCIENCE CENTER (DANFORTH CENTER)

Founded in 1998, the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center is a not-for-profit research institute with a mission to improve the human condition through plant science. Its cutting-edge research, STEM education programs, and outreach efforts aim to impact food security and environmental issues and to position the St. Louis region as a world center for plant science. The Danforth Center is playing a pivotal role in the development and implementation of STEAM-Ag curriculum. Learn more at danforthcenter.org.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Deeply rooted in the university's land-grant mission, the JJK FAN partnership grew out of a working relationship between University of Illinois Extension, the College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and the JJK Foundation. The initiative was elevated to a campus priority within the Office of the Chancellor to strengthen its focus on college preparedness and access. University of Illinois Extension remains a key partner in the delivery of the program. University of Illinois Extension translates research outcomes into action plans that allow families, businesses, and community leaders statewide to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities.