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For retirees, a chance to RISE and shine

We've all heard of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). A play on that name is Retirees in Service to the Environment (RISE). The volunteer program, developed a few years ago by gerontologists at Cornell University and Ithaca College, seems perfect for Schenectady County, with its large and growing number of smart, environmentally conscious retirees.

RISE trains retirees age 55 and up to be environmental stewards who work on programs and projects and educate others about environmental issues.

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schenectady County is looking for 15 volunteers to participate in the weekly training sessions, which will begin March 20 and end April 15. They'll be taught communication and leadership skills; how to assess scientific information; and about such subjects as climate change, home energy use, water quality, soil contaminants, recycling and waste management, nutrition and food systems.

At the end of their training, RISE participants are expected to volunteer with environmental organizations. In this case, they will be assigned to a particular project, sponsored by Cornell University, called "Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth," which needs to be sustained as funding runs out. They'll work on gardens at four inner-city Schenectady elementary schools, teaching students about the dangers of obesity and the importance of healthy eating, which means fruits and vegetables.

This kind of intergenerational education is good for the elderly and children alike. For the kids, it's a chance to learn about something that could change, and even save, their lives. For the retirees, a chance to keep learning and be involved in the community, doing something important and rewarding.

To register for RISE, call 372-1622 ext. 269.