FALL
2007
VOL.18, No.1

URBAN ISSUES

Newsletter of the Urban Resources Initiative at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies

"LEARNING TO GROW"

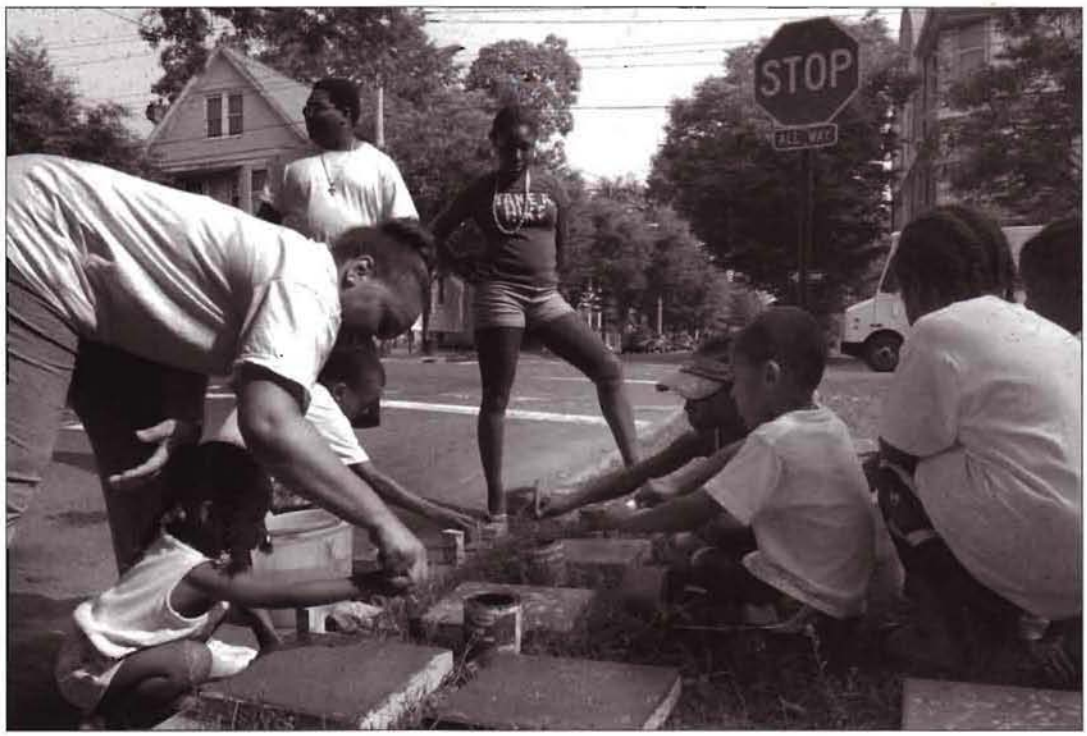

Photo: Josh Schachter

In this issue:

New Trees in Newhallville

by Meg Arenberg

When I first met the members of the group AFACE (Advocates for a Cleaner Environment), I thought I might have a difficult case on my hands. Melanie Boykin, an articulate young mother, was their spokesperson. She greeted me eagerly and described with sweeping arm gestures the neighborhood garden she envisioned. I could feel her hopeful energy, but skeptical looks on the faces of the other neighbors tested my own optimism. The site where we stood, on the corner of Shepard and Huntington Streets, was nothing more than a patch of weeds and a cut-through path worn to dirt. The back of the lot was piled with rubble--bricks, asphalt, pipes and wire, huge pieces of old bluestone curbing buried in the ground. A crooked mulberry tree struggled to survive under a mat of poison ivy and bittersweet vines. The whole lot was littered with trash. I knew other projects on blocks nearby had come and gone, gardens had returned to neglect. A representative from the city drove me through the area that same week and pointed out a few houses on the block known for drug dealing. A shooting was reported a few weeks before.

For two years, Melanie had lived two doors down from the site.

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www.yale.edu/uri

FROM THE DIRECTOR

As in all non-profit organizations, our board of directors is responsible for fiscal oversight as well as to ensure that our programmatic efforts focus upon achieving our mission. Not only do our committed members of the board address these issues, but they also shape the culture of our organization as a place of learning. Our experienced board members act as natural mentors to the staff across many areas of needed expertise: development, finance, environmental education, landscape design, and science. Countless examples come to mind.

When I began my tenure as Director of URI, I knew how to balance my personal checkbook, but I did not know much about balance sheets or other financial statements. At that time, Myles Alderman was our Board Chair, and he patiently guided me through balancing assets, liabilities, and more. More recently URI expanded our Healthy Yards project to address soil contamination. We launched this effort largely part because our current Board Chair, Jody Bush, encourages our staff to test new ideas in the field from exploring contaminants in the soil to carefully examining design choices. Since the inception of URI in 1991, Susan Foster Swensen has steered our environmental education program. She created our Open Spaces curriculum and mentored our staff and interns in teaching hands-on exploration of New Haven. Sara Ohly, Jim Travers, Betty Thompson, Nan Bartow and Evelyn Rodriguez all joined the board after working with URI via our Greenspace program. Their experience in leading their local projects gives them great insight that helps guide our staff to best meet the needs of our neighborhoods.

All our board members make valuable contributions, but perhaps most importantly is their collective contribution of supporting an organization of learning. This credo of learning is clear throughout each article of this edition of Urban Issues. Last January, the board directed the staff to better reach teenagers through our planting activities. Margaret Carmalt writes of the opportunity that Greenspace Manager, Chris Ozyck, seized to plant the city's backlog of street tree requests with the help of high school interns. Pairing our graduate student interns with the teens to plant together created a rich learning opportunity for both. Meg Arenberg describes how Newhallville neighbors, who gathered to clean up a dirty vacant lot, taught the neighborhood children that adults do care and are willing to volunteer and take pride in where they live. And Paula Randler tells us how it takes all the neighbors of Fairlawn Planters working together to further their community's renewal.

Our Open Spaces as Learning Places program reached a new milestone this fall when our Education Coordinator Justin Pegnataro and Susan Swensen were invited to train all of New Haven's 6th grade teachers at a professional development workshop. Avery Anderson tells us how the workshop helped some teachers learn to overcome their apprehension of teaching science.

In the same way the teachers felt safe to try something new by participating in the workshop, our interns and staff are supported by our board to test new ideas, make mistakes along the way, and ultimately make greater progress in meeting our mission. We at URI – the members of the board, our staff, our interns, public school teachers and their students, as well as the countless volunteers in New Haven's neighborhoods – are still *Learning to Grow.*

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

New Trees in Newhallville

(continued from page 1)

She walked past it with her children on their way to school. She swept garbage and leaves from the bordering sidewalk, and watched patrons of the neighboring convenience store hurl their empty bottles and cans into the weeds along the edges. She lamented the spot as an eyesore and an attractor of bad activity. When she heard about URI's Community Greenspace Program, she knocked on doors in the neighborhood, hoping others might feel the way she did agree to create a group and submit an application. One might ask where she found the time and motivation to rally her neighbors. As a single mother with two school-age children, working full-time and taking classes in the evenings, Melanie had a lot of other demands on her time. But the project had a sense of urgency for her.

"I just think about the kids", she told me, on several occasions, indicating the children playing quietly on porches across the street and riding their bicycles down the uneven sidewalk. "Not just my own kids. All of them. They just have to see something else... something better than this."

Despite the cautioned realism of her fellow neighbors--comments like, nothing changes in this neighborhood, and people here won't help--Melanie stuck to her vision. She didn't do all the work herself. She couldn't possibly have. In fact, her own physical contributions were often small--after all, she was a very busy woman. But others in the neighborhood were drawn out by Melanie's efforts and did volunteer, although sometimes grudgingly, to lift shovels and push wheelbarrows. As the lot began to change, so did the energy of those involved--work days lasted longer and more people came out to assist. Compliments poured in from neighborhood passers-by. Melanie stood on the sidewalk and swelled with pride, applauding those who worked and imploring those who walked by to stop and help. The other group members began to joke that Melanie was their public relations representative. They teased her for her optimism but everyone agreed that things had already started to change.

Photo Josh Schachter

Children painting step stones on Shepard & Huntington

By the end of the summer, the lot on Shepard and Huntington Streets was transformed. In a month and a half, AFACE neighbors removed tons of trash and old debris. They whacked down weeds and vines, ripped out poison ivy, spread over twelve yards of new topsoil and mulch, planted two tree hydrangeas, a Shubert plum tree, and a mix of holly, juniper and butterfly bushes. They installed a path of peastone gravel where the dirt track once was, overlaid the entry points with permeable pavers and defined the edges of the garden with old curbstone, recycled from the back of the lot. One Saturday morning, Melanie invited all the neighborhood kids to paint colorful step stones for the center of the path.

During a quiet moment in one of our final weeks together, Darrel, another member of the group, recounted how he and Melanie's boys had watched a monarch butterfly make its way from blossom to blossom along the perimeter of the garden. I smiled at this, but the look on his face made it clear that I had not grasped his full meaning. "I don't think you understand," he told me. He was straight-faced and matter-of-fact, "we don't get butterflies in the ghetto..."

Shepard and Huntington is still a neighborhood facing many serious challenges. A few flowers and new grass have not dissipated absentee landlords or the effects of poverty and addiction. The area is still threatened by gang activity and serious crime. But when I think of that corner, I think of the little girls playing on the porch across the street and the boys riding their bicycles on the sidewalk. It wasn't just hydrangea blossoms and monarchs that Melanie wanted them to see. It was these kids' parents and neighbors hauling wheelbarrows full of peastone and dragging hunks of concrete out of the earth. It was the adults in these children's lives coming together and proving to themselves and each other that their block--that rough urban landscape--is their own. The butterflies are just a beautiful reminder.

MEG ARENBERG is a second year Masters of Environmental Science student at Yale F&ES. She has worked with URI since September 2006, both as a student assistant and as a community forestry intern.

Science Just Became a Little Less Scary

By Avery Anderson

On Monday, October 1st, students filed into sixth grade classroom 318, shuffling and chattering with one another. The teacher stood at the front by the blackboard and organized his props for the lecture. The day's lesson was a little out of the ordinary and both the teacher and the students were excited to get to work.

The students in the scene above are not actually sixth graders. Instead, teachers filled classroom 318 at the Truman School on Monday October 1st for a professional development day. The real students had the day off, and in their place, sitting attentively behind desks filled with notebooks and colorful pencil boxes, sat their teachers.

The instructor at the front of classroom 318 was Justin Pegnataro, URI's Education Coordinator for the Open Places as Learning Spaces (Open Spaces) program. In keeping with URI's mission to "promote environmental education," the Open Spaces program, designed by Susan Swensen, aims to connect New Haven youth to their urban environment. Rather than focusing on far off and hard to imagine places like rainforests, coral reefs or glaciers, the Open Spaces curriculum brings elementary school children into New Haven's urban ecosystem – school yards, vacant lot green spaces, city parks, and nearby rivers and lakes become the landscapes in which they learn about the natural world. If you are unconvinced that nature is all around New Haven, just ask one of the hundreds of students who have gone through the Open Spaces program. They can identify the street trees outside their homes; show you how to test the health of a city lake using chemical and biological indicators; and all of the students can tell you how much fun they had exploring New Haven's environment.

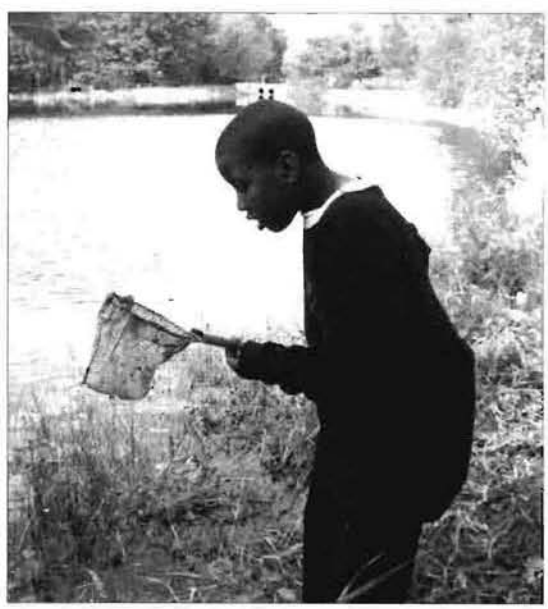
Ten times a week Justin and an intern form the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies visit one of five New Haven public school classrooms to teach hands-on environmental science. He and I teach in three New Haven magnet schools participating in the Open Spaces program. Whether he is elbow deep in soil as he builds a classroom terrarium, or leading a canoe expedition down New Haven's Mill River, Justin is in a perpetual state of making people excited about the natural world around them. The professional development workshop on October 1st was no exception.

Justin began with an activity referred to in the Open Spaces curriculum as "Water World". It involved tossing a globe around the room for the purpose of estimating the percentage of the world covered by water. Justin asked each of the teachers to count the number of their fingers touching water when they caught it. Ten teachers caught the globe. One hundred fingers were accounted for. Percentages were calculated, and low and behold – the class discovered that their simple globe tossing experiment yielded water percentage data that was remarkably similar to the figures estimated by the scientific community. The teachers were impressed by the simplicity of the activity. The equipment and math necessary to run the experiment in their own classrooms were easily acquired. It was clear that this workshop was going to provide tangible activities to take back to their students.

New Haven elementary school teachers don't have it easy; they teach five different subjects (math, reading, science, social studies, and health). Administrators and teachers alike have commented that the science curriculum support provided by URI has been a welcomed relief. Not only does the Open Spaces curriculum cover material that the teachers ordinarily would never have time to get into, but it also fleshes out aspects of scientific method and theory that some of the overworked teachers might have forgotten. The next activity at the workshop was an example of this.

Wrapping up the Water World activity and putting away the globe, Justin launched into the second exercise – a state mandated "embedded perfor-

Photo by Justin Pegnataro



Students are actively engaged in the Open Spaces program

mance task," called Dig-In. Dr. Richard Therrien, the Science Curriculum Coordinator for New Haven Public Schools, asked Justin and board member Susan Swensen to lead this training workshop and equip teachers to teach this lesson. Dig-In involves creating an experiment to test the effect of soil grain size on absorption. Preparing the teachers to take a more participatory role in this activity, Justin carefully explained the various parts of an experiment – hypothesis formulation, dependent variable, independent variable, and controlled variable. Immediately a murmur could be heard in the classroom; it was clear that some of the teachers were not completely comfortable with these terms. "Science" had just descended on the classroom, and Justin could feel the uneasiness. He calmly asked for questions. A brave hand shot up in the back of the room, and Justin called on her. "Um – I don't really like science. It makes me nervous." Another teacher called out "Yeah – me neither. I wasn't ever any good at it, and that's why I avoid teaching it in my classroom."

Given how many daily variables teachers need to worry about, it seemed perfectly reasonable that designing a carefully crafted science curriculum wasn't at the top of their to-do list. Justin was un-phased by the concerns, and confidently reassured the teachers. "If you ever have questions, we are here to be a resource for you." Slowly - science got a little less scary.

All in all, the Dig-In activity was a huge success. Justin laid out the materials for the experiment: a bucket of gravel, a bucket of sand, a bucket of clay, measuring cups, water, and empty liter soda bottles cut off at the base with mesh screens placed over the mouths. The teachers set to work in designing their absorption experiment and Justin milled around the room answering questions without providing too much formal instruction. Several teams of teachers put the materials to one side, and started by drawing up a game plan. Others got straight to work, dumping sand into measuring cups and persevering through trial and error. Similar to their own sixth graders, these teachers learned the concepts behind designing an experiment as they made a few false starts, asked a couple good questions, struggled to explain their ideas to others in their group, and got their hands dirty.

Mira Manickam, an Open Spaces intern, in Ms. Souasa's classroom

By the end of the class period, the scariness of science had just about evaporated. Several of the teachers asked Justin how they might go about setting up a similar exercise in their own classrooms. Anticipating this very question, URI staff had prepared 70 "kits" of materials to hand out to each of the teachers who attended Justin and Susan's workshop. As the teachers filed out of the school at the end of the day, Justin and I stood in the parking lot and handed out 20 pound garbage bags of gravel, sand, clay, and liter soda bottles to teachers on their way to their cars. A couple of the teachers asked for two or three kits. Some asked how to go about getting the Open Spaces program into their own classrooms. Others just thanked us.

The teachers who sat before Justin at the October 1st workshop represented a portion of the outstanding public school leaders dedicated to educating the Elm City's youth. One objective of our Open Spaces program is to increase teachers' capacity to teach children science and build their understanding and appreciation for their natural surroundings. The Open Spaces program is an opportunity for collaboration with teachers, and a medium through which educators can be supported in science/environmental education.

Ms. Sousa was one of the teachers who attended the workshop and in whose classroom we teach the Open Spaces program. She epitomizes everything a teacher should be: excited, knowledgeable, questioning, joyful, and above all else – goofy. Her students hang on her every word, and respond in eager unison when she asks them to identify a sycamore, or listen quietly to the call of a chickadee. She has successfully made tree roots pushing up through pavement dynamic; leaf identification is a thrill; and tracking the progress of a squirrel burying nuts for the winter is exhilarating. Without question, Ms. Sousa is an excellent teacher, and in partnership with URI's Open Spaces program, the combination is deadly. Kids have no choice; they can't help but fall in love with nature.

AVERY C. ANDERSON is a Master of Environmental Management student at Yale F&ES. Her masters research is on human-wildlife conflict in the American West. While in New Haven she has taught in 5th and 6th grade classrooms for the Open Spaces as Learning Places program.

When Teamwork Rules the Day

by Paula Randler

As I eased into stop-and-go traffic on Whalley Avenue and drove past some of New Haven's oldest neighborhoods, I soon arrived at the intersection where Blake Street makes its way north between a brick warehouse and historical homes. Fresh, tangerine paint contrasted sharply with the grey flakes of older, empty homes. This juxtaposition of old and new existed because Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), a national non-profit organization is renovating 12 homes along Whalley Avenue, Ella T. Grasso Boulevard, and Blake Street. The renovations are important, however community members initiated the next stage in taking control of their neighborhood by formalizing neighbor relationships. Three neighbors, Fayan Robinson-Sims, Maurice Smith, and Major Ruth, and assisted by BR Hammed-Owens of NHS, applied for a URI Greenspace grant and formed The Fairlawn Neighborhood Planters.

During two initial Fairlawn Planters meetings, we had great participation and I explained the Greenspace program's purpose and provisions. We walked the neighborhood and discussed possibilities with street trees and front yards. URI defines public spaces loosely as those areas that border the street including curb strips, front yards, and vacant lots. While the first tree we planted was in Fayan's yard, most of the 21 trees planted by the neighborhood volunteers were in the curb strip along Blake Street. We always had enough hands to get the work done. At each planting, new people came to help dig a hole, push a wheelbarrow of compost, or swing a pick-ax. While some of these people were not interested in joining us long-term, they expressed curiosity about the program and supported the effort. Over the course of the summer, the Fairlawn Planters grew to include twelve regular participants from the surrounding neighborhood, a hopeful sign that relationships would continue to form.

As is always the case, the community members' initiative is what begins the process of neighborhood revival. Neighbors apply to URI's Greenspace program through a simple one page grant application. Though not required, a space exists on the application for the neighborhood groups' name, which is often times quickly created by the newly formed band of volunteers. Though a seemingly simple gesture, creating a name for themselves helps to generate potential for longer-lasting community run organizations. I quickly learned why Fayan Robinson-Sims was a co-applicant for the Greenspace grant in her neighborhood. Her enthusiasm and welcoming personality showed others how a community group could blossom with just a few neighbors coming together. Fayan's commitment inspired an array of neighbors and family to come out and plant. Her husband, Anthony, and children, Kyle and Sammy, helped at almost every planting. Even her father, visiting from Jamaica, planted a tulip tree in a front yard. I'm sure her delicious coconut shrimp and other tasty homemade goodies also enticed a few workers. The home renovations were a start, but Fayan's effort to take an active role in the beautification of her neighborhood was a real driver of the entire neighborhood's revitalization.

Taking a break from tree planting

Neighborhood renewal is not borne from housing rehab alone, or accomplished by one strong individual. Rather, it happens when neighbors rally together to change their community. For instance, Sandra Taylor and Ellen Short specifically took on the key role of communicating with fellow neighbors. While Sandra gave the best smiles and the warmest hugs, Ellen kept us company and offered moral support after recovering from surgery. Sandra joined the group at our planning meeting, a time designated to discuss the Planters goals for their Greenspace project. Her outgoing personality made her the perfect candidate for the unofficial PR representative of the Fairlawn Neighborhood Planters. When we met a new neighbor on the street, Sandra was

happy to call and follow up with our initial encounter. When someone walked by with a question, Sandra always explained the group's activities and invited new membership.

Ellen convinced many of her reluctant friends to join the planting efforts. The Fairlawn Planters chose to give Ellen's yard a makeover and on this day three groups of people, who'd never stopped to comment on our planting, came by to see what all the fuss was about. Ashley, a mother of two and resident of the light blue stucco fourplex on the west side of Blake Street, came out to plant that day for the first time. Her presence wasn't heralded as any sort of major change among neighbors, but I viewed it as the next step in reaching more of the renting residents. Maybe our day in Ellen's yard, apart from making the space beautiful, also opened the door for other Blake Street neighbors to feel comfortable interacting with the Fairlawn Neighborhood Planters.

The days we planted were times for people to connect with one another, discuss pending community issues, and admire their own hard work. These weekly planting gatherings involved so much more than just greening the neighborhood. Each week I heard murmurings of sidewalk improvements, street light installation, and agreements to encourage other residents to join the efforts on the block. They discussed installing speed bumps, organizing litter pick-ups, the role of the Block Watch captain and other community driven initiatives. Some of the changes the residents desired required assistance or coordination from the outside, but the most important features of all these projects were the neighbor relationships and community sparked initiatives.

The dynamics of the neighborhood made people like Fayan, Sandra, and Ellen vital to the success of the Planters initiatives. Area residents were a mix of homeowners, renters, and some absentee landlords, which complicated efforts to invite community participation. We had a particularly good relationship with an absentee landlord, in whose yard we planted a Tulip tree, with the expectation that her tenant would water it. This was not the case though for some other landlords and connecting them to the vision of revitalization still remains a major challenge. This neighborhood has achieved significant recent visual improvements including the home renovations and various street and yard

plantings. In many respects these physical improvements are the easy steps. The difficult aspect is forging these lasting neighbor relationships and building strong community bonds. It is the actions of the community members themselves that inspires the most change. The Fairlawn Planter's greatest assets are people like Sandra, Ellen and Fayan, whose clear hospitality, friendliness, and dedication offer the most hope for neighborhood improvement.

PAULA RANDLER is a second year Master of Environmental Management student at Yale F&ES. After working as a URI Community Greenspace Intern in 2007, she is now firmly entrenched in the urban forestry movement. After graduation, she'll work to support urban trees and people in the American South.

Our Resident Photographer

During the summer of 1999, Josh Schachter worked as a URI intern, photographing the faces and stories behind the Greenspace program. Nearly every summer since then, Josh continues to document URI's work. He says URI "jumpstarted his photography career and instigated a passion for exploring and documenting urban issues." He works with organizations across the country documenting community issues such as urban revitalization, HIV/AIDS and food security. His images are published internationally in books, magazines, newspapers, films, and websites. Josh earned his master's degree in environment management/social ecology at F&ES, where he taught inner-city youth to explore their environment through photography. He continues to work with youth, teachers, neighborhood groups, and nonprofit organizations to help them share their lives and communities through photography. You can learn more about Josh's work at www.joshphotos.com and www.storiesmatter.org.

Understanding Cities as Ecosystems

by Rhea Hirshman

Tromping around the edge of an athletic field on a sticky August day, approximately 30 students from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES) whacked away at clumps of bittersweet, phragmites, purple loosestrife and other invasive vegetation. These incoming graduate students were participating in the "urban mod," a segment of a three-week-long orientation period consisting of three themed modules (or Mods). This Mod is intended to provide students with basic knowledge of forestry practice and urban ecology.

The urban Mod, which is in its third year, "fosters an understanding of cities as ecosystems," according to Gaboury Benoit, professor of environmental chemistry and co-director of the Hixon Center. Last year, F&ES students worked on restoring an open space on Yale's campus, however students' feedback indicated a desire to work on a site more connected with the New Haven community. The Greenspace group at Beaver Ponds seemed like a good match.

The Beaver Ponds Park, like many wetlands, was long treated as useless—drained, graded, filled and developed. However, over the past several years the park benefited from more attention, both from the city's Parks Department and from the Friends of Beaver Ponds Park, a long participating community group of the Greenspace program. The park is the largest Greenspace site, 109 acres, and requires such extensive work that URI identified it as a perfect site for the urban Mod. 100 Yale students could easily undertake major restoration efforts while not taking ownership away from the community group.

During the urban Mod, students learn basic restoration practice and some

The Billion Tree Campaign a Global Success

In the spring of 2007, Urban Resources Initiative joined the United Nations program to plant 1,000,000,000 within the year. So far, because of people all around the world, 794,044,908 trees were planted through the Billion Tree Campaign. URI saw this as an opportunity help to raise awareness of the benefits of trees, and pledged to plant at least 100 trees with volunteers in the year 2007. The organization can proudly report that over 150 trees were planted in New Haven by the Greenspace community volunteers, student interns, and the participants of the GreenSkills = GreenStreets program.

The Billion Tree Campaign's success comes not only from the hundreds of millions of trees planted, but also from the community borne from the project. The campaign's website keeps a tally of all the individuals, organizations, and, companies who have planted trees and how many they have each planted. The wide range of projects and participants is tremendous. In the United States alone, the number of trees planted by either an individual or company ranges from 1-1,000,000,000. This campaign provides the opportunity for every person, even those who can plant just one tree, to become a crucial force in this global cause.

local invasive species identification, and gain a connection to a New Haven community. Benoit said that studying the ecology of cities is a newer field, "positing a new kind of environment, intrinsically different from forests or savannas or plains."

"For a long time," he added, "research tended to focus on 'the pristine system with human disturbance added,' but people influence their environments in complex ways that go beyond just being a disturbance. The point of the urban Mod is to explore that perspective, using a variety of methods and tools. New Haven is an ideal laboratory because it is a typical urban ecosystem."

Throughout the four days of the urban Mod, students were introduced to several of those tools. Marcia Cleveland, a Yale Law School graduate, who began practicing environmental law in the mid-1970s and returned to school to update her knowledge of science and policy, said, "Probably most fun was the geographic information systems training." GIS, a computer-based tool that teaches students how to take human census data and depict it spatially, was used by Cleveland and her classmates to map the area around Beaver Ponds Park. They examined such questions as: Who lives near the park? Who would use it and for what? Do factors such as age, income and cultural background affect how people use a space? How might the needs of young families differ from those of elderly residents? How could data gleaned from GIS be used to help a community group both enjoy and care for the land?

Sarah Enders' favorite experience was an afternoon spent at the New Haven County Historical Society, using another tool geared to understanding an urban ecosystem—historical documentation. "I am fascinated by the maps from the 1850s, which showed streets, property boundaries, housing developments and the appearance and disappearance of roads," she says. Enders graduated from Yale College in 2006 with a degree in geology and geophysics, and is in the fifth-year program at F&ES. "I had lived in New Haven for four years as an undergrad but, looking at that material, I've begun to get a sense of how an urban landscape evolves over time."

Photo by: Peter Otis

Tom Siccama helping a student to identify a plant specimen

Students also used several of the more traditional methods of ecological study, including plant identification and water sampling, the latter done at three tributaries of the West River: The main branch, Wintergreen Brook and the Beaver Ponds outlet. "Each of these sites represents a different level of development," says Benoit. "There are no surprises—the water near the most developed area, the Beaver Ponds outlet, has the worst quality. But this exercise exposes students to a variety of tests and tools that they will be using throughout their time here, such as using meters with probes to determine temperature and pH; colorimetrics, in which chemical agents are added to a sample and an evaluation is made based on changes in color intensity, to determine nitrate levels; and titration (adding agents to a sample and observing degrees of reaction) to test for alkalinity."

On the final day of the urban Mod, students met three community members, Nan Bartow, Richard Olmsted and Ed Grant, at Beaver Ponds Park to begin the actual restoration process. The students yanked vines, sawed branches, dug up extensive invading root systems and hauled massive piles of the debris. They prepared an area of the park for the planting of native species, including red and white cedar and viburnum. In addition to partaking in this laborious task, students began to build a sense of camaraderie, fulfilling a main objective of the Mods. The work the students accomplished at Beaver Ponds Park nicely mirrors the goals of the Greenspace program, as the focus is about encouraging people to become active and positive stewards of their own environment.

RHEA HIRSHMAN is a freelance writer in New Haven.

Trees In

by Margaret Carmalt & Tal Ilany

The Parks Department has the public mandate to plant trees in New Haven's right-of-ways, such as the curb strip between the street and sidewalk. Over the past several years, residents filed requests for desired street trees creating a backlog that the Parks Department had difficulty fulfilling. Thus the Department asked URI to help address this growing accumulation that created an opportunity to form a new project, Green Skills = GreenStreets.

The fact the Parks Department recruited URI for this task makes perfect sense, as volunteers have planted over a thousand trees since 1995 through URI's Greenspace program. Remarkably, the trees planted have a 95% survival rate, a statistic reflecting the follow-up care volunteers gave the trees. URI believes tree planting important for the environmental benefits as well as for the opportunity for community stewardship. Trees can contribute to the environmental health of a city by cleaning the air and water, providing habitat for wildlife, and sequestering carbon. People appreciate the beauty of trees and in urban environments especially, the lack or presence of trees sometimes defines a neighborhood. People coming together to plant often provides a sense of community pride and togetherness, a sense that through collaboration a neighborhood can become a better place to live.

Building upon the accomplishments of the Greenspace program, the URI board and staff sought ways to better involve teenagers. The GreenSkills = GreenStreets is a new initiative specifically focusing on providing high school aged kids with job skills through planting the backlog of requested trees.

Through GreenSkills = GreenStreets, URI staff and interns planted 40 new street trees throughout the Elm City. The project allowed URI to enlist cooperation with the New Haven Parks Department, and students from both the Common Ground High School and The Foundation School. Four former URI Greenspace interns (Community Foresters) worked with students this past school year from each of these two high schools.

On each Friday during the fall, students from The Common Ground High School worked with Community Foresters, Kim Yuan-Farrell and Margaret Carmalt. Students, Chris Williams, David Vargas, and Sa'Quan Williams, were selected by their school to participate in the tree planting internship with URI. Over the nine-week internship, Chris, David and Sa'Quan learned many important professional skills and an appreciation of green space management within a city. They learned principal methods of tree care including maneuvering and planting trees weighing an

Meg and Paula with the Foundation School students

Chris, David, Margaret, Sa'Quan, and Kim

average of 500 pounds, pruning, soil nutrient amendment, and weed control. These skills provided a practical context in which students learned about the natural life cycle of trees, the properties of soil, and gained a closer connection to their natural surroundings through the hands-on approach. Perhaps even more importantly, the students also experienced situations they will inevitably encounter in their future careers, such as working as a team, interacting with clients, and meeting expectations of an employer.

The students from The Foundation School met every Thursday morning to plant trees with Meg Arenberg and Paula Randler (see their articles on pages 1 and 6). These particular students have Asperger Syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder. The plantings aid in social skill building, job training, and provide a very concrete sense of accomplishment. The students from the Foundation School really "dug into" the work and became quite proficient. These students and their supervisor will work this winter on trail and tree care along the Farmington Canal Rail Trail in New Haven.

The opportunities for the growth of this program are tremendous. Although this was our first year, it was a positive experience for the high-school students as well as for Meg, Paula, Kim and Margaret. This program has a lot of potential to develop into a more formalized and structured educational project for teens, while also improving New Haven's urban forest. Given the success of the first planting season, URI plans to expand the scope to involve more teens and plant even more trees next spring.

MARGARET CARMALT is a second year Masters of Forestry student at Yale F&ES. In summer of 2006 she worked for URI as a Community Greenspace Intern. In January, Margaret will join the Forestry Division in New York City to work on the MillionTreesNYC Project.

TAL ILANY is a first year Masters of Forest Science student at Yale F&ES. She is currently working as URI's editor and enjoys volunteering for the OSaLP program.

New Greenspace Tee

F&ES graduate Nicole Rousmaniere played a critical role in the design and layout of New Haven Green Maps (available for free from URI). She continues to help URI on projects both large and small, such as creating our new Greenspace logo. New tee shirts displaying the logo are now available for $20 by calling 203-432-6189 or emailing uri@yale.edu. Purchasing and wearing our shirt around town is just one more way you can support URI; thanks!

FALL
2007
VOL.18, No.1

Photo by: Josh Schachter

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