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URBAN ISSUES

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

WORKING TOGETHER



Photo by: Marshall Duer-Balkind

Trees, Teens and Jobs

by
Kim
Yuan-Farrell

“Mporeis na to kaneis! Mporeis na to kaneis!” chanted Dahiana Baez as three of her schoolmates rolled a 400-pound rootball into a large pit in the curb strip. The high school junior had learned the Greek translation of “You can do it!” from her co-worker, sophomore Dimitri Lemonas, who was guiding the trunk of the young Pin Oak as it slid smoothly into its new home in the Westville neighborhood. The team of five Common Ground High School students had only been tree-planting for a couple of weeks, but they already formed a cohesive team, cheering on and helping one another on the job. They are five of twenty New Haven teens greening the

city’s streets this fall while gaining job skills and professional development.

Only one year ago, URI launched GreenSkills to help satisfy New Haven residents’ desire for street trees while teaching practical urban arboriculture skills to high school students. With the shadow of global climate change in the background and economic uncertainties roiling the economy, this project could not be more relevant to providing New Haven youth the skills for building a sustainable future.

The impetus for the program arose in response to the Parks

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In January 2007, our board of directors reviewed our program activities at the organization retreat in order to chart future actions. Together, our board and staff contemplated the strengths of our Greenspace and education programs and discovered a weakness. We were supporting hundreds of community volunteers across the city and successfully teaching science to 11 and 12 year old children in public schools, yet we were not engaging many teens in their environment. To answer this challenge we piloted a new program, GreenSkills, that focuses on job skills and environmental stewardship among high school students. Kim Yuan-Farrell, a Yale graduate student who has worked in both our Greenspace and GreenSkills programs, wrote the cover article for this issue describing how our GreenSkills

program has now expanded to include twenty New Haven teens, who are each learning to make an impact by planting trees in New Haven.

We asked each of our contributors in this edition of Urban Issues to submit articles about how youth learn from their urban environment. The author's stories turned out to be not just about the young, but also about how the youth interacted with both each other and those older than themselves. Jeannette Penniman had the opportunity to work with ten young men from Your Chance for Change on an International Peace Garden. Angel Hertslet writes about how a group of twelve year olds worked to achieve the community's vision of a restored playground and butterfly garden for a pre-school playground.

Mira Manickam's article recounts the story of Mr. James Scott, a leader in Newhallville, who has been quietly working to maintain a Greenspace in his community for over a decade. Over these many years, Mr. Scott has been an important figure to children of that neighborhood. In Yi-Wen Lin's second summer of working with URI's program she was surprised to meet a newly formed Greenspace group with major ambitions. In sharing the story of the SoHu Greenspace group she shows how a well organized team of neighbors can set a new record in one summer.

Our education program is reaching a new milestone this year as the New Haven Board of Education adopts URI's river and pond lessons as part of their 6th grade science curriculum. We are thrilled to achieve this change at the institutional level. We know our reach will be much greater with all New Haven 6th grade students now learning through our river and pond lesson plans. Bidisha Banerjee relates her discoveries as an intern. She describes how by learning to listen carefully to students, she found the right way to stoke the unique curiosity of each student and mold far richer learning experiences than captured by lesson plans alone.

Each of us can make positive contributions. I believe we are personally rewarded by having an opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways to our environment and our society. When we have faith in our youth and our elders, and provide each other with support and respect, our accomplishments multiply, and our communities flourish.

Colleen Colleen Murphy-Dunning

Trees, Teens and Jobs

(continued from page 1)

Department's years-long backlog of street tree requests left unmet due to funding constraints. Partnering with several high schools and youth organizations, URI's board and staff decided to turn this into an opportunity to better engage teenagers through tree planting internships. At the time, none of URI's programs focused specifically on teens. Through our classroom- and field-based environmental education curriculum, Open Spaces as Learning Places (OSLP), URI has taught school children science and appreciation for their local environment; this new initiative takes an exciting next step, involving teens in meaningful environmental work.

GreenSkills bridges environmental education to applicable knowledge that is relevant to future employment opportunities, empowering youth and providing them with an outlet for environmental action in their community. In planting neighborhood trees, teens in the program learn practical skills in species selection, planting methods, and tree care. They become proficient planters and learn to guide others. "I got skills," Jermale, one of last spring's Solar Youth interns, said proudly after his first solo tree planting. A few weeks later, Jermale and his co-workers led teams of graduate student volunteers in planting 11 trees at Hillhouse High School. This leadership opportunity helped the interns realize that they had become tree planting experts.

The teens develop a trade-specific vocabulary as well as expertise about the functions and benefits of urban forests. They also build general workplace competence and confidence and gain valuable and transferable insights about professional behavior, employer expectations, and other workplace issues. Interns learn more about college from their Yale student mentors and discover the value of meaningful, paid work. Additionally, the internship provides them with experience and credibility that may give them a leg up in future employment searches. Indeed, some



Kim Teaches Russell to Make a Mulch Ring Around a Newly Planted Tree

interns are applying their GreenSkills experience now. Junior Russell Bedard applied for and received a youth entrepreneurship grant to create an urban tree planting project called Living Roots. He believes his GreenSkills internship "will help me become a better leader and planter, so that I can take that project places."

The work experience gained by GreenSkills interns will be particularly valuable as economic experts predict a recession. Job loss has been continuous since early 2008, with the recent dramatic economic downturn bringing about layoffs in most industries. Meanwhile, the imminence of global environmental crises are spurring many Americans to realize the need for renewable and domestic sources of energy, sustainable lifestyles, and significant action on global warming. One area in particular holds promise for growth: the transition to a green economy.

This alternative model of economic activity, incorporating social and environmental concerns, will likely include a transition to clean energy,

localized production and consumption, and a boom in "green collar" jobs that address global warming and other environmental problems. Van Jones, author of *The Green Collar Economy* claims that this transformed economy will create millions of American jobs. Urban forestry will be part of this equation.

Urban forests serve multiple functions and provide a wide variety of benefits. Trees improve air and water quality, provide habitat for wildlife, beautify neighborhoods, improve property values, and reduce crime. In addition, urban forests have important climate benefits. By removing and storing atmospheric carbon, trees help reduce the concentrations of greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

Urban trees also provide shade and evaporate water through their leaves, cooling cities and reducing air conditioner use and the health impacts of the urban heat-island effect. Further, strategically placed trees can lower wind speeds and provide an insulating effect, reducing indoor heating use. Many cities around the world have begun urban tree

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The Stalwart Mr. Scott

By Mira Manickam

It's a sunny and crisp October afternoon, the kind of autumn day for which New England is famous. Sixteen school children from Lincoln-Bassett Elementary School, dressed in their navy pants and white t-shirts are lined up silently on the corner of Watson Street and Bassett Street in Newhallville listening to Mr. James Scott talk about the Community Greenspace there, which he meticulously maintains. Their teacher Ms. Perreault seems moved by the attentive faces of her class, she knows that this lively group is rarely silent.

But Mr. Scott is the type of person who commands attention. He stands six feet tall and speaks in a gentle caring tone, teaching the children life lessons as he tells them about the Greenspace. "I come down every day and pick up trash and litter. I like to keep it clean. Even though I don't leave the litter myself, I like my place to be clean."

The children all nod, and gather round closer as he walks with them down the mosaic concrete path in the middle of the garden, which the neighborhood residents and children helped decorate years ago. He points out how the children put their hand-prints in the cement and made designs out of old metal objects they found in the lot. The school children from Lincoln-Bassett are on a field trip through URI's Open Spaces as Learning Places program. They have come to the Community Greenspace at Watson and Bassett Streets to learn about how neighborhood residents can transform a vacant lot into a beautiful pocket park.

That is exactly what the residents of Watson Street and Bassett Street have done. In 1997, the neighborhood blockwatch began rehabilitating this corner lot, which back then was a dumping ground. Led by Constance Crosley-Myers, with support from URI's Community Greenspace program, the residents of Watson and Bassett Streets got together to clear out the trash and

weeds, and plant a garden in its place.

Year round, the garden remains one of the neatest and prettiest public spaces in the neighborhood – largely because of Mr. Scott's tireless efforts at maintaining it. Many of the original members of the Watson and Bassett gardening group have suffered from illnesses, are less able to work due to old age, or have passed away. But Mr. Scott is constant. Mr. Scott can be seen tending to the Greenspace, weeding in the spring, watering throughout the summer, and raking leaves in the fall.

The neatly manicured lawn, the thriving rows of spirea bushes, flowering

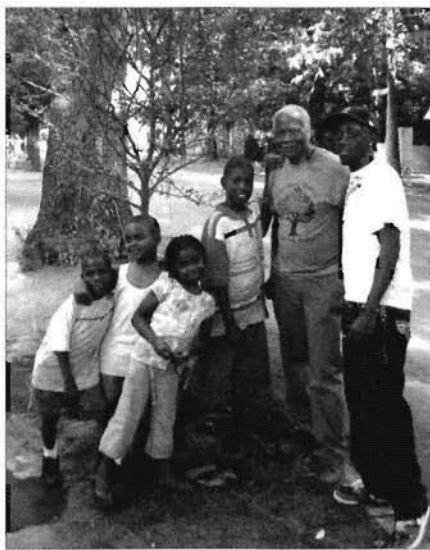
Bassett Street was just an extension of his love for gardening that he developed growing up on a farm in South Carolina. He explains that he used to keep fruit trees in his backyard on Bassett Street, and would give out the fruit to the children in the neighborhood who passed by. "I'd rather give than have someone take it. I've never had a problem with people taking, because I always give."

When asked for his favorite memory of the Watson and Bassett Greenspace, he replied that it was putting down the mosaic concrete path that runs through the middle of the garden. "Seeing all those people involved, doing their own thing, making their own little creation. It's like being a part of history."

The children from Lincoln-Bassett School are also captivated by the path. One boy traces his fingers over the mosaic of blue glass marbles arranged in a sunburst on one of the path's squares. He notices with dismay that some of the marbles have been removed from the mosaic. "Maybe I can bring some new marbles to replace them," he suggests. Mr. Scott's spirit of stewardship is infectious.

Mr. Scott recently retired from his job for over 30 years at the Atlantic Wiring Company, and he plans to move back down to South Carolina in the coming year. He says that before he leaves, "I just want to try to find someone to take my place. I won't be here and I hate to see all the work we put into it go to waste." Hopefully the impact he has on the children of Lincoln-Bassett who have visited the Greenspace this day and the children of the neighborhood who garden by his side each summer will outlast him, and the Greenspace which he has worked so hard to cultivate will continue to thrive.

Mira Manickam, F&ES 2008 is the Education Coordinator for URI's Open Spaces as Learning Places Program, and a former Community Greenspace intern.



Mr. Scott with Neighborhood Kids

delicate pink flowers in summer, and the beds of lilies, hostas, and hollies are a testament to Mr. Scott's green thumb. He invites the children from Lincoln Bassett school, many of whom live nearby, to join him in the upcoming weekend to rake leaves. He says, "It's good for the kids. It let's them know what's going on in the community." All summer long, Mr. Scott works on the Greenspace once a week and is frequently joined by a crew of young helpers from the children on Bassett Street.

Mr. Scott explains that helping out in the Greenspace at Watson and

Pre-Teens Plant Preschool Park

By Angel Hertslet

Storm clouds brewed as we gathered at the corner of Orchard and Edgewood for our first workday. We were already attempting the nearly impossible: transporting six cubic yards of mulch into the barren lot via two wobbly wheelbarrows. I distinctly remember the moment the sky opened up. Qiana, one of the mothers in the core group of volunteers, and I doubled our pitchforking speed and the little kids screamed in fear of the rolling thunder. In just a few minutes the downpour was too intense to continue and we fled for cover.

The lot on the corner of Orchard and Edgewood has been long overdue for a makeover. The children who attend the Montessori School two doors down on Edgewood Avenue use the area for their playground. Each morning the about twenty-five three to five-year olds come out to play on what could be charitably described as a dirt patch. Linda Townsend Maier, who heads up both the Greater Dwight Dev. Corp. and the Montessori School, led the movement to revitalize the playground. They applied to the Community Greenspace program to transform the space. The playground was desperately in need of improvement, both for the children who play on it daily and for the community members who walk past it everyday. Investing in local landscaping would be more than a cos-

metic change, it would bolster community spirit and bring pride to the block.

As the project gained steam, more volunteers came out of the woodwork. Parents, teachers, administrators, and neighbors all saw the value in transforming the corner into a livable, usable, and environmentally-enlightened space. The reasons for involvement were as diverse as the volunteers: some were concerned about lead in the soil, others wanted to see the playground become an outdoor classroom to teach kids about environmental stewardship, and still others simply wanted a respectable place for their children to play. Alone these would have been great goals for a Greenspace group summer, but the project took on a deeper sense of meaning the day Micah showed up with a gaggle of friends in tow.

Micah and his friends, like many twelve-year olds in the summer, had plenty of free time on their hands. At first there was a bit of confusion about the difference between mulch and compost — “which one is the dog dookey?” — but soon they were pros, quick to explain the reason why we were using compost to newcomers. It quickly became apparent to us, however, that for them, creating a butterfly garden from bare dirt was more than just a way to pass the time, it was a passion.

Twelve-year olds may not be able to push heavy wheelbarrows of topsoil on their own, but get four of them working together, and consider the job done! “Tickle the roots, tickle the roots” soon became the mantra the older kids chanted to the younger ones as they gently loosened the plants’ root balls before planting them in the garden. They all took turns watering the plants. They tested each other on plant names. They boasted to each other about their garden smarts and the brawn they could muster transporting soil.

Witnessing neighborhood kids take ownership over a refurbished park in their neighborhood was remarkable. But even more moving was watching the development of a strong sense of in-

tergenerational respect. The older folks in the Greenspace group who worked alongside these super-kids watched them come out time after time to struggle with unwieldy pitchforks in the hot sun. In their eyes the “work” of creating this garden was actually a form of play, a fun project, a pleasure. And when Linda threw a pizza party for the kids, you can bet that earned some respect in the other direction too!

From the care the young boys took when tickling the roots to the methodical approach they used to water each and every plant, it was clear they had already blossomed into environmental stewards. The world’s environment is in decline and yet many urban youth have little connection to the natural world. And without that connection, how can we ever expect to understand both the intricacies and fragilities of caring for our rapidly declining environment. Until we create opportunities for them to interact with nature in our urban centers, we leave them with nothing to spark environmental stewardship. Only through direct contact, through the rewarding experience of planting trees and flowers for the whole community to enjoy, will these children have the opportunity to cultivate a lasting commitment to the environment.

And I think I may have earned their respect too. That summer I was also working with another volunteer group in the same neighborhood on lead remediation in front yards. One day I looked up to find Micah and one of his friends peering down at me from their bicycles. “You really do plant stuff all around here!” he exclaimed. The two of them hopped off their bikes and got to work on the project with gusto, and I knew for at least this summer, I was more than just a flash in the pan to them.

Angel Hertslet graduated from Yale College in May with a bachelors in environmental studies. She also worked URI Community Greenspace intern.



Micah’s Friend Watering the Butterfly Garden

Moving with the West River

By Bidisha Banerjee

"If it's really true that the earth is moving around the sun, why can't we feel it move?" asked Angel on my first day as an Open Spaces as Learning Places intern at Barnard Elementary School.

Angel's question flowed out of the River Unit's core purpose, challenging New Haven students to go deep into fundamental aspects of the world: watersheds and water-tables, the relationship between ground-water and vegetation, the parts of a river, and much more. His tone was defensive, as if he expected the query to be summarily rejected, but Angel's brown eyes brimmed with intensity. It would take me several weeks, and a canoe trip down the West River, to discover how his question related to the River Unit we were teaching.

In small groups, Angel and his fellow-students in Ms. DeStefano's 6th grade classroom had just finished creating model rivers in plastic salad trays with spray-bottles as their source. Pebbles had been transformed into river-banks, and topped off with a thick layer of sand: drops of red food-coloring stood in for pollution. Holding the spray bottles aloft, the students had created rain, and watched the red drops percolate through the pebbles, seep into the ground, and mingle with the river.

Turning from the white-board where she had just drawn the parts of a river, Mira Manickam, URI's Education Coordinator, gave Angel a question for his question: "When you're in a car, going 60 mph, does it feel like you're going fast?"

Angel shook his head vigorously. Maybe this wasn't the moment to tell him that Einstein had been stuck on exactly the same problem.

"What about if the car stopped suddenly? Would you feel the speed change?"

"Yeah," said Angel, frowning and smiling at the same time. Instead of

supplying him with the answer, or worse, ignoring his question because it didn't pertain to rivers, Mira had made Angel think harder by giving him a down-to-earth analogy. This strategy – part Junior Socratic Method, part hands-on learning (with liberal amounts of food-coloring thrown in) drives URI's Open Spaces as Learning Places program. But this is only a small part of the program's unique mission -- getting youth to explore their surroundings with newly-honed senses.

URI stresses that nature is not just "out there," but is also intimately nearby – in our school yards, forgotten parks, damaged rivers, and empty lots. I had learned the same lesson running environmental education programs in rural India last year, and I was surprised how easy it is to forget, even at the Yale School of Forestry. The villages where I worked had an abundance of fish, birds, insects, and plants – but many kids did not spend time getting to know them, and brought up lions and tigers when asked to list 'local' biodiversity. I intervened in several different ways –

organizing school-yard scavenger hunts, and guiding a group of kids through the process of making a mural about local biodiversity – but, for the most part, I had no institutional support.

For the first time, at URI, I found a like-minded community of environmental educators who are committed to continuously improving their teaching methods. To have been one of the last student teachers in the Open Spaces program during its last semester has been a bittersweet experience. After nine years of curriculum development and teacher training, URI is transitioning from direct instruction to teacher support as the New Haven Public School System adopts the Watersheds curriculum. The River and Pond units have now become mandatory parts of the 6th grade science curriculum across the city. As a result, with a mixture of trepidation and excitement, teachers are venturing out of their classrooms, and becoming experts on interpreting New Haven's ponds and rivers. (Look for more information in our spring newsletter).



Ed. intern, Kathayoon, Explains Adaptations of Aquatic Invertebrates

All that nervous anticipation pays off when teachers and students finally come together outdoors – a ground truth of the Open Spaces program. On a radiant day in early October, our three 6th grade classes, including Angel, arrived in the West River Park, just across the street from the Barnard School for the culmination of two weeks of river-related indoor activities. At first, the kids were jumping and whooping, releasing all their pent-up energy. They quickly sobered in the face of five no-nonsense rangers from New Haven Parks and Recreation, who handed them life-jackets, and paddles. We split the group in two: the rangers took half the group canoeing while the rest of us rambled along the river bank on a scavenger hunt.

When European settlers first arrived on the Connecticut shore, West River Memorial Park was a salt marsh. Over the next few centuries, the addition of tide gates and fill has turned the area into a brackish marsh dominated by *Phragmites australis*. Although it might be classified as a degraded ecosystem, we unearthed a multitude of resilient life. I was amazed by several classroom teachers' patience, skill, and enthusiasm

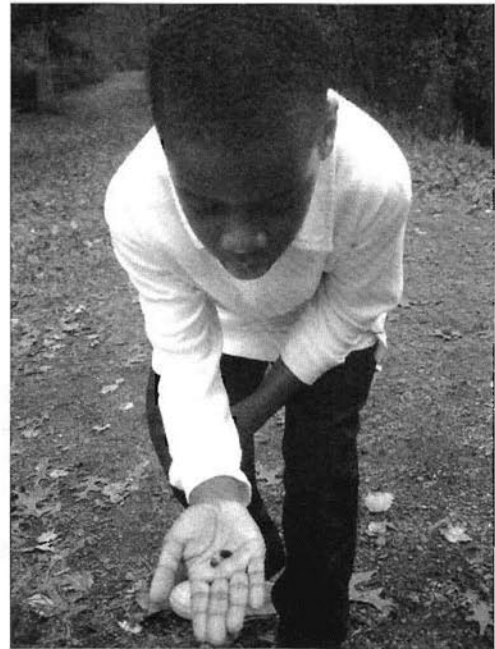
for teaching directly from the natural world. Praying mantises...milkweed...ospreys...who knew that such riveting treasures could hide in open view of busy New Haven, or that busy classroom teachers could share their wonder with students so openly?

The scavenger-hunt group waved enthusiastically to their friends on the river; their friends waved back. Then it was time to switch places. On the last trip of the day, I found myself in a canoe with Angel, and an affable ranger named Terry. A few weeks earlier, Angel had confided in me – he was anxious about canoeing, because he'd never done it before. He stepped onboard gingerly, and lost his fears immediately. Propelled by Terry, we made our way through the calm river and rounded a bend to discover a small island.

Taking that turn was breathtaking. Lush vegetation hid us from the view of the other canoes. The flat, tidal river lay ahead. It felt like we could paddle forever, and keep exploring New Haven's hidden riverine worlds. An osprey flew over us, and curlews and gulls regarded us from afar.

But we turned back. "Have you ever felt the earth move under your feet?" Angel asked me. I paused, wondering if I should disappoint him on such a glorious day; I decided to answer his question with another question. "Have you?"

Angel answered, "Well, I've tried to, but my



Observing Caddisfly Larvae Closely

sisters keep getting in the way. They're always around, playing soccer."

"I see," I said, and we paddled along in silence. I puzzled over why Angel kept returning to this question, and then, suddenly, as the water parted for us, I began to understand. Open spaces themselves would answer Angel; my role was simply to ask him if he could feel the answer in his bones.

"Do you feel like the earth is moving now, on the water?" I asked Angel.

"Yes!" He said, as if it was obvious. And it was true; as we propelled ourselves down the shallow, flat river, it both moved with us and was the surface upon which we moved.

Bidisha Banerjee is a first year Masters of Environmental Science student at Yale FES. She was an Open Places as Learning Spaces education intern this fall.



Using Seine Nets to Explore a Pond's Edge

Peace Garden Bridges Generational Gap

By Jeannette Penniman

A common perception of our society is the large disconnect in experience and understanding between generations, in particular, between the youth—my generation—and the mature—my grandparents' generation. However, while working with a group at the International Peace Garden at West River this summer, I witnessed the ability of community greenspace work to bring together these disparate generations to the benefit of both. Over seven weeks, the vision of an older generation was made reality by the vigor of a younger generation.

When I began working with the Peace Garden group I was worried that they would be unable to achieve their goal of replanting the garden along Ella Grasso Boulevard between North Frontage and Legion Avenue in time for September's International Day of Peace. The group, though passionate about their effort and fun to work with, was made up of only five adults from the community, and the garden was overrun with weeds. We spent the first four weeks intensely weeding to clear the site, leaving only three weeks in which to completely replant the garden. The success of the project looked to be in jeopardy.

As fortune would have it, the group received an immense boost of needed energy from an unexpected quarter. Ten young men (Demetrius Hudson, Tabias Contreras, Joseph Harris, Jason Gabel, Dorian McGhee, Anthony Garner, Todd Pleasants, Garrett O'Connor, Andrew Spino, Raymond Cortez) from Your Chance for Change (YCC) had been assigned to help out with the gardening. YCC is a residential program offered as an alternative to incarceration for young men ages 18-21 with community service a main component. The young men threw themselves into the work at the Peace Garden, quickly planting evergreen trees, digging endless holes for shrubs and perennials, and shoveling, carting, and spreading a huge pile of mulch over the garden. In just three work days, the group not only met

their goal of completing the garden in time for the International Day of Peace, but forged new bonds of intergenerational collaboration.

This collaboration occurred at a contentious time in New Haven, when youth were seen as the source of many of the city's crime problems. I expected that the adult members of this Greenspace group were not immune to the negative stereotypes about youth, especially youth offenders who tumbled out of the YCC van wearing baggy clothes and earrings, and were continuously clutching cigarettes. Yet, I believe that bringing together neighborhood adults and young men from YCC to success-

ied too deeply, and contributed much to decisions of plant placement. They learned readily and listened to what others requested of them, and impressed everyone with whom they worked with their dedication and industriousness to a project that had little personal benefit or significance for them. They energetically took a pickax to a sheet of buried concrete that could not have been moved without them and took on the mundane task of creating neat edges around the garden without complaint. The only grumbling was over the strong stench from the steaming compost pile and my attempts to feed them veggie burgers. The Peace Garden group clearly gained



Taking their Place in the Community

fully create garden dispelled stereotypes on all sides.

Despite some of the negative stereotypes of my generation, these young men were integral to creation of a beautiful Peace Garden, injecting energy and enthusiasm to get the job done on time. They worked diligently at planting, many showing great attention to proper techniques they had just learned. One young man always took great care to make sure the plants were not bur-

a great deal from these young men, both the physical creation of their garden, and a better appreciation for the diligence, respectfulness, and virtue of the younger generation.

Likewise, the young men learned a lot from this group of adults. Leaders like Stacy Spell and Muriel Curry offered the perfect balance of discipline and encouragement to reinforce positive behavior. Stacey, a former cop and father of six, was adept at regaling

us with wild stories of being young and single in New Haven in the 1970's. A big, intimidating man, Stacey treated the young men as temporary sons, always pushing them to exhibit respectful behavior to each other and take more initiative if he discovered one sitting while an older individual was digging. Yet Stacey also constantly expressed his appreciation for their hard work, and taking a moment to reflect, could only say, "It was a great experience, great collaboration."

nearly 80 years, and was one of the most energetic, impressive, and warm older women I have ever met. She commanded a great deal of respect from the young men, and I could see that they benefitted a great deal from working with a powerful, older maternal figure. They were forced to temper their language and display a certain "gentlemanliness" by making sure she did no work they could do for her. Each night, after several hours of hard work, Stacey, his wife Virginia, and the other adults would grill hot dogs and

hamburgers for the young men - allowing them to experience the shared reward of hard work and the benefits of a close community. Without a doubt, this summer proved that it is true that the younger generation, including myself, has much to learn about character from working with individuals of such wisdom and experience as Muriel and Stacey.

On September 21st, I attended the International Day of Peace celebration at the garden and enjoyed an energetic reunion with Muriel, Stacey, and other people

I had worked with. The Peace Garden was beautiful—the Sedum in bloom and the plot infinitely tidier and more cared for than three months before. Muriel's only lament of the afternoon was that the "boys couldn't be there for the celebration." (As it turns out, they were already doing community service at another site.) After all, she said, "They did all the work. It's thanks to them the Peace Garden is what it is." The Greenspace program was a unique setting that allowed this intergenerational collaboration to occur and the resulting exchange of ideas and experiences. Everyone involved, from teenager to octogenarian, left this project with not just a renewed Greenspace, or more dirt under their fingernails, but also a heightened respect for what people of all generations have to offer each other.

Jeannette Penniman is a Sophomore at Yale College intending to major in Environmental Studies. She was a URI Community Greenspace intern last summer.



Bridging Generational Divides

Muriel Curry, meanwhile, had lived in New Haven for 70 years of her

Trees, Teens and Jobs

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planting initiatives, such as New York City's "Million Trees NYC" program, to capture these benefits.

GreenSkills interns will be well positioned to seize new opportunities in green-collar jobs in particular, but not just those in urban forestry. The vocabulary and knowledge of sustainability they have learned, along with their tangible skills and experience in urban greening, could help make these high school students competitive in a tight job market.

Perhaps most importantly, for many of our interns, the GreenSkills

position is a first job – for some, their first meaningful job. Through the internship, these young people can develop their confidence and interests, while also gaining a sense of personal efficacy and self-determination that will support their pursuits no matter what field they work in. The young trees planted by each GreenSkills crew stand as lasting reminders, tangible results of the effort and contribution of each youth. The teens can visit their trees and show them proudly to parents and friends. As they get older, the interns can see their trees grow bigger and feel empowered and

emboldened in their lives and work.

Last year's 10 GreenSkills interns planted 145 trees in New Haven. This year, 20 teens from Common Ground High School, Foundation School, Solar Youth, and the Youth Hill Action Team will plant even more.

Kim Yuan-Farrell is a Master of Environmental Management candidate at Yale F&ES. She worked as a URI Community Greenspace intern, Open Spaces as Learning Places environmental educator, and GreenSkills mentor.

SoHu Sets a Record

By Yi-Wen Lin

When I first read the application letter from the SoHu (South of Humphrey) group in May of 2008, I thought that this group must be insane. Although I was impressed by the clarity and organization of their application, I didn't believe a new group who had never planted trees before would be able to plant at least 35 trees in one summer alone. That is an average of 4-5 trees per week! I vividly remembered my first time planting trees with a new Greenspace group in the summer of 2007 - we had a good turnout, but everyone was exhausted by the time we got the second tree into the ground. How could a brand new group possibly succeed at planting more than four trees a week, every week, throughout the summer?

The SoHu Greenspace group grew out of the SoHu Blockwatch, an association created in August 2007 to improve the safety of their neighborhood. Their block watch became interested in the Greenspace program after many of its members noticed the difference that three new cherry trees made on the character of Pleasant Street. The trees had been planted by students from Common Ground High School and a local resident as part of URI's Greenskills program. The SoHu group was also inspired by the street tree plantings by the nearby Eld Street group. Led by Lisa Siedlarz and Jim Austin, the group decided to expand to expand their blockwatch mission from safety to include the greening of their neighborhood and applied the Greenspace program.

Lisa and Jim walked up and down the streets talking to neighbors, listening to people's concerns and hopes. Lisa and Jim's effort led to the inclusion of other residents from the neighborhood in addition to the blockwatch members in planting and taking care of the street trees. Along with Jim and Lisa, Mike, Kevin, Heidi, Michelle, Paul, Adam, Rob, Bill, Judy, and many others came almost every workday and became good friends.

Through their outreach they put together their ambitious tree-planting plan and created an email list that was particularly instrumental in organizing volunteers and building excitement. Community members brought their families and friends to participate in the planting. More than a dozen regulars came together every week, bringing whatever resources they could contribute. Mike brought his jackhammer. Kevin offered his pick-up truck, Paul his flatbed ATV, Heidi and Susan brought their wheelbarrow and many more besides.

But could their energy and organization meet the huge task of planting 35 trees in a single summer? For example, in order to plant some of their trees, the group had to create new tree pits by breaking up 18 four-inch thick concrete slabs with picks and a jackhammer - hard work for a weekend morning. They also had to contest with the summer weather - hot sultry days and thundering storms. As Lisa recounts, "It was our 3rd planting... where it was raining like mad and we still had 23 people showing up to plant! And we got 5 trees in the ground! And after that, we became the talk of the city!"



Placing a Tree into a Newly Opened Tree Pit

By the end of the summer the group had planted 44 trees and 156 perennials along Pearl, Clark, and Pleasant Streets far exceeding my expectations. My early fears about the group's overambitious goals had proven unwarranted. Though they worked just one day a week, they had achieved a new Greenspace record for tree planting in one summer. The group has even created their own website at www.SoHuNewHaven.org about their activities and an archive of their pictures. All of the Greenspace groups I have worked with are unique but the SoHu group stands out for me. Each event had an exceptional turnout of 20-40 people and the group recorded an incredible 650 volunteer hours this summer.

What made this group so unique and its members so committed? I don't have a perfect answer, and neither do Jim or Lisa. Maybe it was the heroic efforts of their leaders, or maybe it was the character of the people who live there, or something else entirely. Whatever the cause, the result is undeniable. Lisa describes the change that has come of the neighborhood best: "I don't think any of us expected there to be such terrific, dedicated participation. I don't know why people bought in to the project like they did; I just know that it changed the dynamics of the neighborhood drastically. We greet each other by name. We stop and talk to each other on the street. We watch out for each other. It's just been an amazing experience!"

Jim and Lisa have "already started to compile the new tree request list for the next summer" to fill in more gaps in the street tree canopy. The group is also interested in expanding to help a similar group on Orange and Humphrey Street (OrHu?) in the following year. Now I know never to underestimate what a committed community group can accomplish in a summer.

Yi-Wen Lin graduated from Yale F&ES with a Masters of Environmental Management and works for URI as a Greenskills program coordinator.

Lewis Street Park Heroes

By Seth Zeren

On a chilly October morning, I arrived at the Lewis Street Park, already teeming with energy. Ten volunteers from Lowe's along with four community members were already hard at work planting several dozen shrubs. Lewis Street Park is a small community playground close to the Quinnipiac River in the Fair Haven neighborhood.

The Lowe's Heroes program has partnered with URI, volunteers from the neighborhood and the Park's Department to give the Lewis Street Park a much-needed makeover. As the volunteers took a break to drink hot coffee and snack on donuts, Chris Ozyck (URI's Greenspace Manager) laid out the plan to build a series of small walls to shore up the site's slope and build a large set of wooden steps leading from the play structure at the bottom to a planned patio and water play area at the top of the park.

Through the Lowe's Heroes program, employees donate their time, and the store donates materials - particularly helpful on a large park renovation. Raúl, a volunteer from Lowe's plumbing department was exceptionally adept at driving the galvanized steel spikes into the large wooden ties to form the risers. Once the components were ready, we



Mark and David Lift the Heavy Wooden Steps in Place

carried the steps into position and held everything together with more spikes. Mark, a Lowe's cashier, and David a resident from the neighborhood carried most of the steps up into position. "It's a lot of fun," said Mark, who enjoys getting out of the store and spending time in the community, giving back.

As we took a break for lunch, David and I talked about giving money and giving time to improve your community. A long-time Greenspace leader and neighborhood activist, David explained

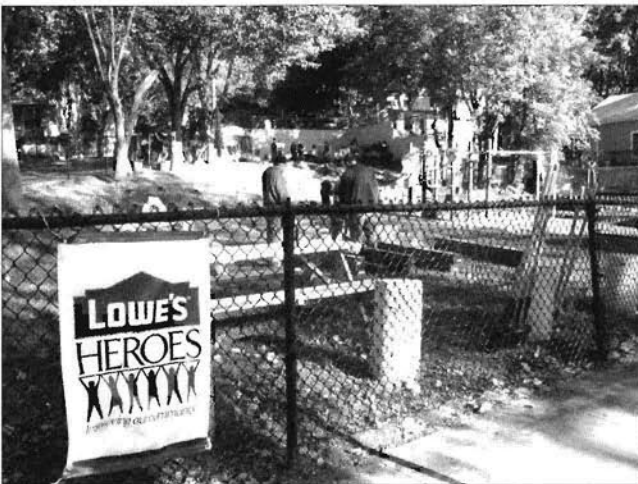
"You're doing this for your kids; you're doing this for your neighbor's kids." David's wife Heather also worked while their newborn son Cole slept in his carriage. Over the course of many weekends, other neighborhood volunteers have helped out on the park makeover, including those who do not have children, but still

chose to participate for the greater good of the neighborhood.

The energy of the Lowes' workers complimented by the resources donated from the local store on Route 80 has really multiplied the energy of the community members, and advanced the project quickly.

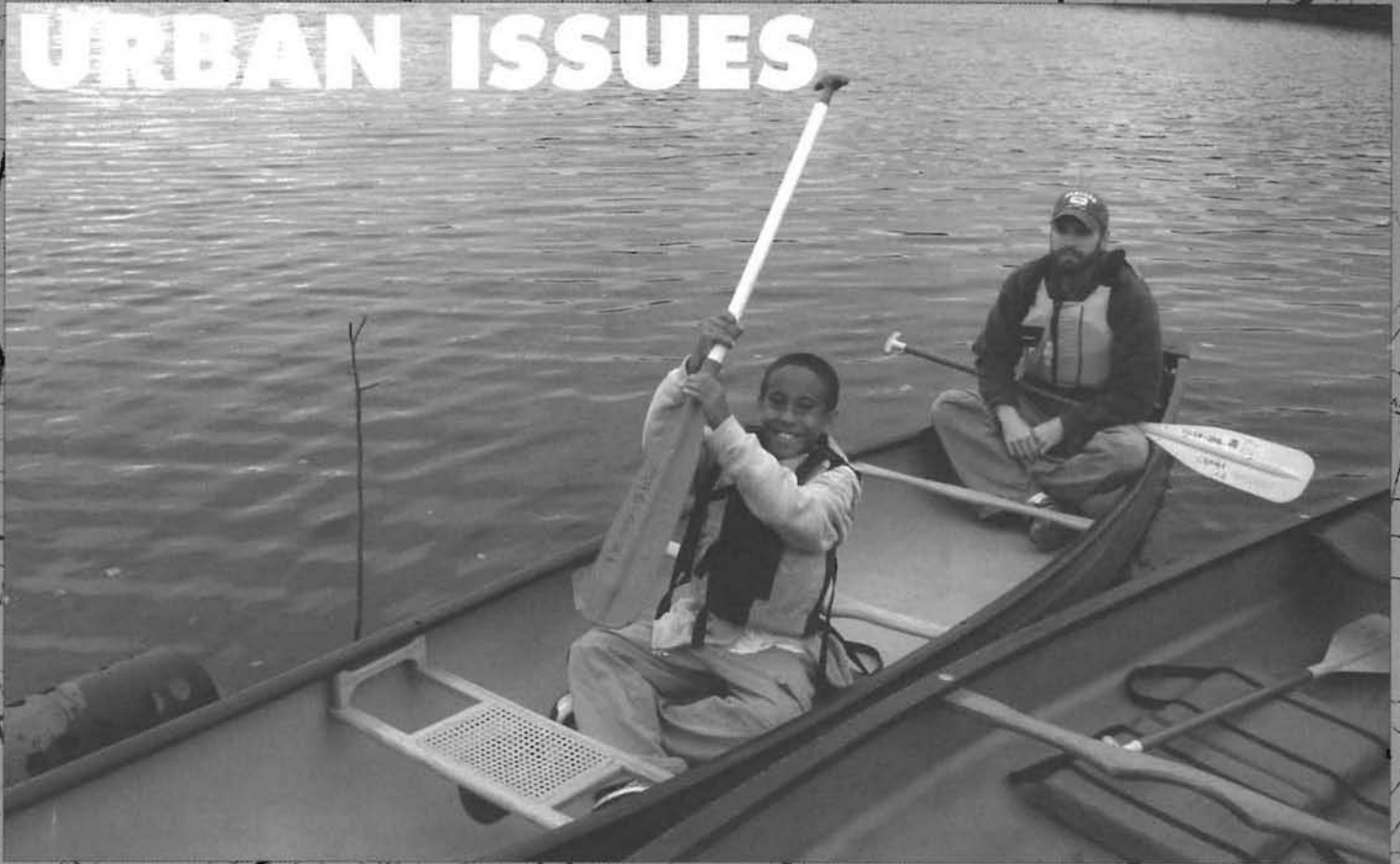
The Park's Department got the renovation rolling by removing unwanted elements and by quickly providing guidance and approvals. Over the course of the fall, the entire park has been transformed into a unique play-space that melds traditional active play equipment with grade changes, robust plantings and a fantastic river view. In the spring, neighborhood volunteers will be able to watch their children playing on the new swings they installed with the donations from Lowe's.

Seth Zeren is a Master of Environmental Management student at Yale F&ES. He is the student editor of Urban Issues.



Working in the Lewis Street Park

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