

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



Photo: Steffi Graham

In this issue:

Learning Takes Time 3

New York City's Parks Education 4

Interview with Bill Burch 6

Open Spaces as Learning Places 9

Hixon Fellow Profiles 10

Thank You to Our Sponsors 11

NETWORKS ACROSS ECOSYSTEMS

by
**Keith
Bisson**

URI has an impact beyond the neighborhoods here in New Haven, where the hard work of local people and students contributes to healthier urban ecosystems. Our collaborative efforts in New Haven also inform the practice of students who go out into the world and share their experience with other communities. In the last issue of *Urban Issues*, we profiled former URI intern James "JJ" Jiler who now runs the greenhouse project on Riker's Island in New York City. In this issue, we are profiling Erika Svendsen, MES '93, who shared the stage with JJ in November 2002 as part of the Hixon Center for Urban Ecology Distinguished Speaker Series.

Erika has a passion for grassroots community-based urban ecosystem management. Since her days as a

graduate student in New Haven, Erika has developed an expertise in understanding how the social functions of an urban ecosystem are crucial to its overall health. After graduating, Erika worked for the Neighborhood Stewardship program in Baltimore, where she worked with Baltimore URI community forestry interns for several years. Combining this expertise with an interest in urbanism and social cohesion, Erika now works in New York City as a social science researcher with the USDA Forest Service Northeastern Research Station.

A thread throughout Erika's career is an interest in how social networks are integral to urban ecosystem function. In Erika's presentation in *(continued on page 9)*

**NEW HAVEN / URBAN
RESOURCES
INITIATIVE, Inc.**

**Yale School of Forestry
& Environmental Studies**
James Gustave Speth, *Dean*

**Hixon Center for
Urban Ecology**
Gaboury Benoit, *Co-Director*
Stephen Kellert, *Co-Director*

URI Faculty Advisor,
William R. Burch, Jr.

URI Director
Colleen Murphy-Dunning

Greenspace Manager
Christopher Ozyck

**New Haven/URI
Board Members**
Josephine Bush, *Chair*
Myles Alderman
Gordon Geballe
Christopher Getman
Robert Kreidler
Bruce Lewellyn
Lawrence Lipsher
Sara Ohly
Patricia Pierce
Evelyn Rodriguez
Joseph Ryzewski
Joanne Sciulli
Leigh Shemitz
Susan Swensen
James Travers
Harry Wexler

Urban Issues
Keith Bisson, *Editor*

URBAN ISSUES
Spring 2003
Vol. 13, No. 2

www.yale.edu/uri

At URI we believe the means to creating and sustaining healthy urban ecosystems is by engaging local communities in the management of their environment. This seems like a straightforward approach, however, developing programs to work with communities requires a clear vision of a fuzzy word—whom do we intend to engage and partner with when we say ‘community’? Concentric circles might best illustrate the different communities that we are a part of—from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES) to New Haven, the state, the northeast region, the nation, and beyond.

Certainly, one form of ‘community’ is the groups of residents who make up the neighborhoods across New Haven. Through our Community Greenspace program, groups of neighbors (blockwatch groups, church groups, gardening groups, and others) reclaim their communities by replanting their local landscapes to address problems and realize their goals. Another ‘community’ served by this program is at F&ES and is made up of students and faculty. The URI program exists at F&ES to provide students a clinical learning experience in urban, community-based forestry that augments theoretical classroom learning. In the Community Greenspace program students learn through field experience while serving as a technical resource to the ‘community’ of neighbors who lead local restoration projects. In turn, the neighbors guide the students on how to best implement planting projects in the context of their community—and thus together they achieve a ‘mutual pathway of learning’. The long-term benefits of this mutual pathway are eloquently described by F&ES student and intern Austin Zeiderman’s profiles of two current URI board members.

Another form of school ‘community’ exists at the elementary-school age, where we engage children through our environmental education initiative, Open Spaces as Learning Places. In this program, a ‘community’ of 5th grade students and their teachers learn scientific principles and environmental stewardship through exploration of open space sites in New Haven. Again, F&ES students benefit by gaining teaching experience while serving as interns in this program. In this *Urban Issues*, former intern Lianne Fisman describes URI’s first teacher training workshop, bringing together New Haven Teachers, URI staff and board, and F&ES students.

In addition to local activities, together with other organizations, city agencies, and the U.S. Forest Service, we are developing a regional model sharing effort—the “Urban Ecology Collaborative”. Partners in the cities of New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Pittsburgh and New Haven are launching a collaborative by sharing, replicating and bringing to scale across these cities model programs for improving the delivery of urban community forestry projects. Alex Brash, Chief of New York City’s Urban Park Service and a contributing writer in this issue, and Erika Svendsen, profiled in student Editor Keith Bisson’s article, both F&ES alumni, are important partners in this initiative.

If we are to achieve our mission of forging community-based partnerships for rehabilitating the social and physical fabric of urban neighborhoods, we need to see ourselves as part of a network of communities of learners. Whether these communities are groups of neighborhood volunteers, city staffers, 5th graders, graduate students, teachers or faculty, or professional organizations, together we must learn the means to be stewards of a complex, changing world. Indeed, we must take inspiration from the words of people such as Professor Bill Burch, who admonishes us on these pages to “look at your assets when no one ever thought you had any and use them to build a better place for yourself and your children.”



Colleen Murphy-Dunning

Learning takes time: looking back on the past and forward to the future

Two Greenspace participants and board members share their experiences

Sarah Ohly initially became involved with URI upon recognizing the important role that gardens play in bringing people together. Neighborhood association meetings among residents from Farnum Court and Wooster Square took place in the garden behind Sarah's house. People would arrive half an hour early just to sit in the garden and talk. Eventually their discussions turned to creating more gardens in Farnum Court and the surrounding community, a task for which URI's Greenspace Program was a natural partner. So began a community collaboration that is still bearing fruit.

Reflecting back on her years of participation in the Greenspace Program, community activist Sarah Ohly recalled that "each week was a different short story and a different study of how things worked." A resident of the Wooster Square neighborhood in New Haven since 1968, Sarah became involved with URI in order to get to know her community better. She spent extensive periods of time studying and working abroad, but had a limited understanding of the community that she called home. In her words, "there was a sense of community around Wooster Square...I knew that I had to sweep the sidewalk and get the snow cleared" but lack of time prevented her from getting to know her neighborhood well.

In 1997 Jim Travers, another Greenspace participant and board member, began working with a community group in Beaver Hills where his mother lived. The group identified Blake Street as the main artery of the community and therefore the most worthy of attention. Together they planted numerous trees, shrubs, and flowers, and lob-

bied the city to tear down an abandoned building to create a community greenspace. The group planted nearly every tree on Blake Street between Fitch and Osborne. The one tree that they did not plant was the only tree standing when they began. People in the community have begun to notice a rise in home ownership – Jim himself recently moved into the neighborhood. "Five years before," he says, "I wouldn't have put in the investment."

This summer, the group will review its accomplishments and develop a less demanding work plan. Jim explains that this is not because they feel their work is complete or they have lost interest but because of the need to take time to look

back on their accomplishments, discuss what has worked in the past, and begin thinking about the future. "People need to be able to step back and see that they did something successful," which, after five years of intensive work, will also provide a much welcomed rest.

Sarah also recognizes that the ongoing learning nurtured through the Greenspace Program is critical to success. The first summer of working at Farnum Court, Sarah remembers, ended with a celebration involving music, poetry, and food. This was a time when people gathered in a relaxed way with a feeling of accomplishment and pride about their work. Sarah sees the potential for these sessions to be celebratory as well as reflective; to be a forum for end-of-season discussions about what is working, who is participating, and where there are *(continued on page 5)*

by
**Austin
Zeiderman**



Sarah Ohly working with residents in Farnum Court.

In Order to Save the Biodiversity of the Amazon, We Must Also Work in the Parks of New York City

by
**Alexander
R. Brash**

The wolves were not returned to Yellowstone by Montana's ranchers or ivory-towered academics. The wolves were returned to Yellowstone by government agencies acting on the desires of a huge block of voters from the urbanized coasts who have a strong environmental ethic close to their hearts. To preserve the last redwoods, to halt the clear-cutting of Asia's dipterocarps, and to save endangered species, we must sow and cultivate a love and appreciation for the environment throughout the nation. In the past few years, the Urban Park Rangers in the New York City Parks Department have been doing just that.

The New York City park system consists of more than 1,680 park properties covering over 28,000 acres, or roughly 14 percent of the City's total land area. Some of these are huge and famous like Central Park and Prospect Park, and many are simply playgrounds, small squares, and malls scattered throughout the City. There are now roughly sixty interpretive Rangers working from ten nature centers among the five boroughs. In the past few years the Urban Park Rangers have undertaken a comprehensive review and re-organization of their environmental education programs. The Rangers have historically

provided ad hoc interpretive walks throughout the City's parks and, generally speaking, the quality and consistency of the programs has been textured to say the least. The fact remained that while the Rangers are all highly motivated and well educated, a bird program given by a botanist was weak, while the same program given by an ornithologist was outstanding. The Rangers needed to move the bar up to match performance with public expectation.

The first step in undertaking an overhaul of the system was actually comprised of three parts. The Rangers reached out to their customers (school groups, local youth, and general park patrons) and sought input on what was wanted. They simultaneously surveyed not only a great array of environmental programs, but also what other regional institutes were offering, and the delivery systems that peer organizations in the City were using. Throughout this process, the Rangers continued to discuss their findings with the teachers and schoolkids they worked with every day.

The second step was to clearly delineate Ranger programming strengths and weaknesses, and while 'sticking to their knitting', define a palette of programs

that would buttress the schools' curricula, encourage park usage and appreciation, and of course be fun and interesting. Thus, the public programs were redefined so as to fit into three groups. Foremost, the Rangers needed to serve their main customer: the school groups who regularly visit the parks in order to learn more about the natural sciences. Secondly, the Rangers created a solid and replicable after-school program for the older latch-key kids, and finally all the other programs (essentially tours, hikes, lectures, special events, and other activities given on weekends and during school breaks) were grouped under an umbrella called the Explorer Programs.

The third step has been to create high quality programs and re-invigorate the delivery system behind them. With seed money from the National Geographic Society, and working closely with the City's Department of Education, the Rangers created the Natural Classroom Programs. This is a suite of programs covering the natural sciences (i.e., geology, botany, ornithology, ecology) that are designed to specifically enhance the schools' mandated curricula. When a teacher signs up for the program they are sent a package complete with several pre-visit activities that will supplement their park visit. On the day of their park visit the class meets the Ranger in the park, and then sets out to learn about and collect quantifiable data on their subject matter. Later, back in the classroom, the students analyze their collected data and graphically present their findings. These environmental programs use natural history subjects to introduce kids to environmental issues, and do so in a way that uses the parks as living laboratories. As these programs also tangibly support the schools' need to advance math and science, they have received the full support of the Department of Education. Each year, the Rangers reach nearly 50,000 kids from over 600 schools with these programs.

The Ranger's after-school program has also been entirely reconstructed, though



A New York City Ranger working his magic with a group of kids.

based on a very successful partnership initiated more than a decade ago with the Christadora Foundation. The Rangers offer a ten-week after-school program at each nature center. Kids originally come in and sign-up for a specific weekday afternoon, and then the group works with a Ranger to identify, plan, and undertake an ecological restoration project in the area. In the past several years projects have included re-introducing and tracking turtles in Staten Island's ponds, surveying Bronx parks for their potential as owl re-introduction sites, and working in a community in Queens to foster an understanding of the endangered Piping Plovers nesting there. While recent security concerns have limited attendance, this program usually involves several score of kids who stop in at the Nature Centers each afternoon.

Finally, the Ranger's normal palette of weekend tours and workshops has been dramatically expanded to include a new set of physically active programs reflecting the interests of today's park patrons. The Rangers have added canoeing, orienteering, and hiking to their program offerings, and in a major new effort—overnight camping. In the past two years, Alley Pond Park, a beautiful beech forest surrounding three kettle ponds has been opened up to

overnight camping for the City's kids. In partnership with the City's Housing Authority, the Police Department, and with support from the Butler Foundation, nearly 900 kids camped in the park over a period of 40 nights this past summer. For most, this was their first night out under the stars.

The fourth major step in the programmatic overhaul is evaluation and fine-tuning. The Rangers constantly work with New York City school teachers, the Department of Education, and grade school students to elicit feedback with respect to the programs. In addition, in the spring of 2002, four members of F&ES's Seminar on Ecological Restoration and Community Revitalization spent a considerable amount of time at the Salt Marsh Nature Center in Brooklyn. Their primary goal was to examine the programs and gauge their efficacy in reaching the community. The F&ES students found that the Natural Classroom programs are a "particularly valuable type of environmental education...[as they create an] an opportunity for children to directly engage the environment, which in turn promotes stewardship and intellectual growth." In addition, the students offered eleven suggestions for improving the programs, and pointed out that the programs clearly supplement both the "affective" and

"evaluative learning needs" of school kids.

It is my belief that the best citizen is an educated one, and that the future of the City's, the nation's, and indeed the world's ecological health and environmental ethic starts at home. By involving and teaching the kids in New York about parks and their biotic fabric, not only will these kids achieve higher educational goals, but they will also begin to build an appreciation for our environment that will last into the future. For many New Yorkers the closest they will ever come to seeing the nation's natural treasures or its wild edge will be the City's parks. From this perspective, it is clear that we must continue to move the discussions, resources and attention out of Academia and the Beltway and get it to the front lines. It is these citizens of the urbanized east and west, with their desire for a greener landscape and wilder America, that constitute the environmental mandate. They vote in the booth and with their wallet, and it is these votes that will determine the fate of endangered species, tropical rain forests, clean air and water regulations, and the financial incentives driving recycling efforts across the land.

Alex Brash, '85, is Chief of the Urban Park Service in New York City

Learning takes time

(continued from page 3)

conflicts. Even rethinking the goals of the group helps ensure that communication remains open and that energy is spent on the appropriate tasks.

Now, as members of URI's Board of Directors, Sarah and Jim have unique roles of bringing their perspectives, based on hands-on experience with Greenspace projects, to the board's discussions of program planning and finance. They are an integral part of

the 'mutual pathway of learning' that has been at the foundation of URI's work since its inception. The input gained by the addition of Sarah and Jim to the Board increases URI's institutional learning and organizational capacity, which leads to stronger programs. This commitment to encouraging learning at all levels of the program—the community, interns, staff, and board—and in all directions has enabled the Greenspace program to make progress despite the uncertainties and challenges inherent in

their work. There are no concrete answers or foolproof solutions—but by learning from the past, capitalizing on the existing knowledge and skills at all levels of the program, and adapting for the future, more and more URI participants will begin to echo Jim's statement that "without the program, my neighborhood wouldn't be as successful as it is."

Austin Zeiderman, MESC '04, is an URI student assistant.

All Locals are the Politics of Our Time: An Interview with Bill Burch

William R. Burch, Jr. is the Frederick C. Hixon Professor of Natural Resource Management at F&ES, and a Professor at the Institution for Social and Policy Studies and one of the founders of the New Haven URI. Our student editor, Keith Bisson, interviewed Professor Burch to get a sense of the historical underpinnings of URI as well as his thoughts on the future of community-based urban ecosystem management.

Keith Bisson: What was your motivation for starting URI and other community-based urban forest management projects?

Professor Burch: I had been advocating and exploring the notion of community-based ecosystem management since 1969. I was involved in pressing for community involvement in a large USAID project which was to be a long term research program by region. I participated in putting in the social component and then in the final Bangkok meeting it was scrapped and made a separate unit. I continued to explore and work as a consultant in South and Southeast Asia on getting this going and trying to convince my students it was the only way to ensure long term forest and ecosystem resource protection. As the first director of the Tropical Resources Institute (TRI) I had the opportunity to push those ideas of a true biosocial kind of ecosystem management for the tropics.

In 1989 we began our six year, eight million dollar project to help restructure Nepal's Institute of Forestry in Pokhara. As Director of this project I had the job of firing the Chief of Party that our subcontractor had insisted upon and then getting people who shared the same ideas about the job we were hired to do...which was to help Nepal forestry capitalize on the strong community-based effort that it had going and to make that a part of the professional education effort.

That same year, I was on a 'blue ribbon panel' called the Gordon Committee. This group was to suggest a better structure for National Park Service research. On the committee there were a lot of enviros who wanted the parks for the wildlife and to hell with the people. I had a colleague who was a member of that committee, Dr. Ralph Jones, who had just been made Director of the Baltimore Recreation and Parks Department. We found ourselves a minority of two and would share dinner together in the various exotic locations where the group met. I told him about our project in Nepal. And he said, "WHY are you not doing that here in our cities?" and he was eager for some sort of connection. I stopped being Director of TRI, my first true love, and became the Director of something called the Urban Resources Initiative. It was called this because the president of Yale at that time did not want any more institutes.

We had a Yale URI and a local NGO URI in Baltimore, and we did the same in New Haven. We were the research and development arm of the Department of Recreation and Parks. We came up with new ideas, they were tested, and if they worked they became part of the NGO of the Public Agency service provision.

I grabbed Morgan Grove, a F&ES master's student and said, "Boy do I have an offer!" He was our first intern in Baltimore and his job was to prove that white guys probably could not jump but they could be worked with and might even have some value. My central motive was that I wanted a more real and intense field training opportunity for our students. My promise was that they would learn more about participatory forestry and how it all works in three months of work in Baltimore than they would learn in 10 years in the Mt. Hood National Forest. I was right. We gradually increased the number of

interns and they learned much and most of all they gave heart to the workers in the highly threatened agency. We worked with staff and local groups and organizations and politicians and produced the first major plan the agency had ever had. We developed training programs for the staff, who then took over and the message was that all of you are stewards of the Chesapeake Bay. We emphasized the three watersheds as management units. We had seminar groups who did special projects all to serve the community. Many of our graduates such as Sally Loomis and Paul Janhige and Morgan Grove and Bishma Subedi became professionals in the community forestry field. So my motive was to provide a special kind of professional training opportunity for our students. I think it worked well.

KB: Is the community-based urban forest management approach of URI and others replicable in other, smaller cities?

BB: Along the way, Parks and People, Morgan and others secured money from the U.S. Forest Service to make the Baltimore program a model for other U.S. cities. I think Jim Lyons, who was in the Clinton Administration at the time, gave the effort a helping hand as did Maryland's congressional delegation. It had career options, youth education for outdoor careers, the Gwynns Falls Trail and Greenway idea, the creation of watershed associations, the community forestry programs, the neighborhood tree stewards programs, and the use of GIS as a planning tool. The idea was to use natural resources as a means for rebuilding neighborhoods that had lost most of their social capital (only we did not have that buzzword available then). And in neighborhoods still with substantial social capital to help them strengthen this and to not drop out of the race. We stressed the need to use an ecosystem approach in management, in linking functional aspects of public service agencies with NGOs and county, state

and federal groups. To have education, health, public works, parks and recreation fit together for better efficiency, equity and sustainability.

Certainly this is an exportable concept. The need to restructure agencies that have lost their youthful drive, to make Rec and Parks the city's environmental management agency, to give the workers in the agency a new sense of purpose, pride and skills. To learn how to work at the community/neighborhood level and derive inspiration from the youths and kids in those poor habitats. To see city parks as more than some elitist conceit and to see vacant lots as great assets and to bind it all together in terms of reducing non-point source pollution in the name of protecting the Chesapeake Bay, whose products were part of the identity of the city, of the residents and of the State of Maryland. The poor health of the Bay meant the loss of a proud identity. To see how by combining several problems we often find such a fortuitous conjuncture that they become the solution. So it is the

improving identity of the individual, community, agency and of the city itself. That is something that can serve any city anywhere at any time.

KB: What do you see as the future of community-based urban forest management? What trends are shaping how we interact with and in urban ecosystems?

BB: I think we now have enough trials and errors, enough reports and challenges, and enough academic papers and analyses to develop a genuine, functionally new kind of forestry profession. We must start to expect performance standards, we must systematize our theories and techniques and test them to build a proper science; we are beyond advocacy and into systematic science. In this activity we will need the participation of our colleagues and clients in the agencies and the communities. We want a degree granting effort, just as African American Studies, Women's Studies and so forth. We are an edge discipline. We need to make that step from nice fuzzy wuzzy ideas driven by

high hopes and a lot of risk, to things that are cumulative, testable and fit into a specified theory that serves to capture our learning curve. We need to move forward and convert the necessary rhetoric to steady progress, without ever losing our dreams of what could be in our mosaic of possibility and never forgetting our anger that such a rich society can be so detrimental to a land we say we love and to our brothers and sisters whom we have so often overlooked. The crime is that we have starved our public sector and our cities to serve those classes who are well able to look after themselves. All volunteer programs such as we have tried to establish must have the steady availability of modest public capital, public servants, technical resources and regulatory enforcement to let the private means work toward valued ends.

KB: What words of inspiration can you give to people in other cities who want to change their own urban landscapes?

BB: Don't wait for the government, make it come to you. You must not assume a professional victim stance even though you may be a victim, indeed are likely to be one. You must look at your assets when no one ever thought you had any and use them to build a better place for yourself and your children. This is not an overnight happening. But people in New York City, New Haven, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Portland, Oregon, San Francisco and elsewhere are taking their neighborhoods as the central source of their identity. And through street trees, gardens, nurseries, vacant lots; into parks, greenways, and front yard beautification, they have found pride of self and pride of place right where they had forgotten to look...right here...our place...our home. Indeed, all locals are the real politics of our time.



Bill Burch (third from left) leading a field trip in Fair Haven.

Open Spaces as Learning Places: A Community of Learners

by
**Lianne
Fisman**

Since its inception, URI has been involved in various environmental education initiatives, and all of these programs have been successful in imparting environmental knowledge to their participants. The shared experience of those engaged in these programs has resulted in the formation of a loosely knit “community of learners”. Since the spring of 2001, URI’s Open Spaces as Learning Places program has been a catalyst for the expansion and strengthening of this community. Open Spaces provides the opportunity for fourth and fifth grade students to explore and discover the wonders of an urban ecosystem. It is separated into six two-week units, each of which focuses on a progressively larger geographic scale. During the program, students discover nature in their schoolyard, a vacant lot, a local park, a river, a golf course, and a cemetery. Also participating in this journey of discovery are Yale F&ES interns, URI staff and classroom teachers, all of whom act as co-learners and guides along the way. Each of these individuals is now an integral part of URI’s “community of learners”.

Currently, the Open Spaces community includes 375 students, 11 teachers and four interns. This spring, 125 students, two teachers and an F&ES intern will join this educational network. In order to foster a greater sense of connection amongst members of the community, URI recently hosted its first teacher-training workshop. This event brought together representatives from five different New Haven public schools, Marc Blosveren (the Science Supervisor for New Haven public schools), and URI staff and board members for a morning of education and exchange.

The workshop was structured to foster a mutual pathway of learning, meaning that the valuable expertise

and experience of each individual is recognized. This results in a situation where everyone present is both teacher and learner. This dual role was evident at the Open Spaces workshop: teachers shared strategies for how URI can best work in their classrooms; URI staff offered insights into the fields of environmental education and urban ecology; Emily Sprowls, F&ES intern, demonstrated a mapping activity from the first lesson in the Open Spaces program; and Marc Blosveren, Supervisor of Science, New Haven Public Schools, drew on his expertise to illustrate how the Open Spaces program fits within the hands on, experiential learning model that is being promoted in the city’s science program. All of the participants had the opportunity to teach and learn from each other.

A mutual pathway of learning is essential to the growth and development of the Open Spaces program. The curriculum document is a perfect example of how this learning has already served to improve the program. When informal

discussions with classroom teachers revealed their need for clear methods of assessing student learning associated with the program, URI responded by creating a list of learning objectives and assessment tools that are clearly linked to New Haven’s educational standards. These materials are being made accessible to teachers through the distribution of the Open Spaces curriculum document.

As the Open Spaces as Learning Places program continues to grow and reach more teachers, students and interns, URI’s emphasis on building and maintaining a cohesive “community of learners” will continue. Within this community, learning will occur in a variety of contexts (ranging from informal conversations to teacher training workshops), and every piece of information that is exchanged will strengthen the Open Spaces program.

Lianne Fisman, '01, is a PhD candidate at the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning.



Lianne Fisman leading a session at a recent teacher training workshop.

Networks Across Ecosystems

(continued from page 1)

November, she highlighted some examples from her professional and personal experiences. Social networks are the relationships within communities that facilitate communication and make a community function. The importance of social networks became apparent to Erika when she worked in neighborhoods in Baltimore and recognized that community residents maintain pride in their environments even under difficult conditions. As she notes, “community residents eagerly and often intrinsically used the natural world as a way to revitalize their communities. Planting a window box full of flowers or creating a small garden on a vacant lot was a way to beautify – to rebuild – one’s community. Working with children to plant new street trees was a way to communicate and connect with another generation. Cleaning out a trash-filled pocket park was a way to re-establish a place that could be peaceful and serene in a community and life filled with stress and hardships. And painting a bright mural with trees, stars and a ‘hero’ was a way to express and create a vision of who and what this community actually was all about.” In these cases, things might not be perfect, but the system is functioning. Erika stresses that, as urban foresters, “our goal may be to create and strengthen a ‘green infrastructure’...but this system will not survive, over time, if social networks are fragmented and out of balance – if these green spaces are not part of the social functions of a community.”

The importance of social networks was reemphasized for Erika when she began working with Green Thumb, New York City’s 25-year-old city-wide community gardening program. Recognizing that ecosystem health is more than just the appearance of the ecosystem, she concentrated as well on ecosystem function, which includes the social networks of the urban ecosystem. When Mayor Giuliani wanted to sell off some of the gardens, the social network mobilized and helped save them. Many people, at that time, were counting the number of gardens, which numbered 750. What

was initially underestimated and eventually became much more important were the 20,000 people using the gardens. The social networks that had been established between garden groups, the surrounding neighborhood and the city at large were what saved the community gardens. This information was much more difficult to “see” and quantify, but fundamentally part of the community garden ecosystem.

In her role at the Forest Service, Erika is the national inventory coordinator for the Living Memorials Project, www.livingmemorialsproject.org, an initiative which seeks to invoke the resonating power of trees to bring people together and create lasting, living memorials to the victims of the September 11 attacks, their families, communities, and the nation. Ninety-five percent of the living memorial projects in the Northeast are continuing their work as a way to provide a place of serenity and peace, and to bring people together in difficult times.

Erika is also involved in a collaborative effort involving URI and organizations in several northeastern cities that is building on and creating social networks of its own. The Urban Ecology Collaborative (UEC) is a multi-city collaborative of city governments, universities and non-governmental organizations in Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., New Haven and Baltimore. The coalition came together to compile successful models and tools for urban ecological restoration and train the next generation of natural resource professionals to take on the enormous task of managing our urban and suburban resources into the future.

Erika's role in the UEC is as part of the Model Transfer & Training Working Group, which is creating a collaborative website that enables the public to share information as well as download data and “tools” from each of the UEC cities. This group is using web-based technology to create interactive capacity to strengthen the learning and exchange between each city. The group is also focused on help-

ing each develop toolkits for managing the urban environment. Material that has been developed independently will now be enhanced through collaborative input and then used by each city.

In her participation with the UEC, Erika’s professional life has come full circle, and she continues to build on her work in urban forestry, community gardening, and living memorials, in which different site types contribute unique resources and have unique management and stewardship needs. In recognition of this understanding of site context, the Model Transfer & Training Working Group is developing the framework for an urban forestry typology which will be created from data collected from each of the UEC cities. At this time, their goal is to integrate data from UEC cities into the urban forest typology, which includes site types ranging from the street corner to the forest.

Erika’s passion and commitment to grassroots urban ecosystem management and healthy social networks is clear in her participation in the UEC. As she says, “I personally believe that the UEC is an extremely worthwhile endeavor to help create a functioning social system among professionals working in large urban areas. There are certainly many associations and exchanges ‘out there’ but few with such a distinct urban/human focus, and with such a broad ecosystem approach that have focused their exchange at the program level. It is critical that this exchange remains a collaborative with many different points of access, inputs, and outputs.” In an important recognition of the legacy of URI, Erika’s work carries on the collaborative philosophy of URI and shares the experiences of students and communities in New Haven with a broader constituency.

Keith Bisson, MEM '04, is editor of Urban Issues

The cover photo of Erika Svendsen is part of a 10-year collection that Erika and the photographer, Steffi Graham, are editing for publication.

Hixon Fellows Combine Theory and Practice in Urban Ecology Research

The Hixon Center for Urban Ecology creates research opportunities for F&ES students. Student Research Interns are chosen from a pool of competitive applicants based on the connection of their research proposal's to current Hixon Center research, the outreach potential of that research and its relevance to the continued study of urban ecology. On January 21st, the Hixon Fellowship Symposium provided a forum for the 2002 Hixon Fellows to present their research.

Following are brief project descriptions of the 2002 Hixon Fellows.

Olivia Carpenter, MEM '03, studied the social ecology and environmental values surrounding a 40-acre park in Camden, NJ. She is using the park's dilapidated state to illustrate the disconnect among planning, education and environmental agencies and services within the city.

Vic Edgerton, MEM/MPH '03, worked with the Hamden, CT community to conduct a health study of the neighborhood across from Hamden Middle

School. The school and neighboring community were built on soil contaminated by the landfill-borne waste from an ammunitions plant. While the school site had been the focus of attention, the community across the street and Vic's work are now the subject of public interest.

William Finnegan, MEM '03, used his skills as a filmmaker to teach children how to document their environment and community. At the end of his environmental education/documentary filmmaking program, he will assess whether or not environmental education can change students' perceptions about the environment and whether or not those changes in perception will lead to changes in behavior.

Brian Goldberg, MEM '03, conducted research on the characteristics of successful urban open spaces in Bangkok, Thailand. He determined that successful spaces were built on partnerships with defined roles for each partner. These findings provide guidance for communities seeking to create successful urban open spaces.

Javier González-Campaña, MEM '03, studied the development and architecture of the Promenade Plantée in Paris, an abandoned raised railroad track converted into a park. This process and design reveals the potential for New York's proposed High Line, a neglected elevated rail structure built in the 1930s on the West Side of Manhattan. He compared the architectural, economic, and natural aspects of both projects to assess the development potential of the High Line.

Photo: Brian Goldberg



Urban open space beneath an elevated expressway in Bangkok, Thailand.

Christopher Menone, MESc '03, worked with the Council on the Environment of New York City this summer to build databases and produce maps showing the relationship between community gardens and neighborhood demographics. His research studied the stewardship and effects of community gardens in the City.

Terrence Miller, MEM '03, began his research at the Portland, Oregon office of sustainable development, where he studied issues of urban runoff and incentive programs to develop rainwater catchments. He then compared residential applications of these systems to

the requirements of LEED guidelines, and is currently pursuing research into how both applications tie into human values of water.

Alicia Pascasio, MESc '03, studied the complexities of large-scale watershed planning and management. Her research used a policy sciences methodology for “mapping the social context” to examine the conflict over the use of water resources within the watershed of the São Francisco River in Northeast Brazil. The methodology identifies participants and their perspectives in the debate over water use and is used as part of a larger process that seeks to

develop public policies in a manner that promotes the common interest.

Abdalla Shah, MEM '03, researched the establishment of a pricing system for reliable water services in Zanzibar Town on the island country of Zanzibar. His work included contingency valuation methods to evaluate government policy options for financing and managing public water supplies.

For more information on student research internships, please visit the Research section of the Hixon Center web site at www.yale.edu/hixon/.

thank you

Many Thanks To Our Most Recent Donors

INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Nancy and Myles Alderman
Penn Bailey
Oliver Barton
Pamela Blum
Josephine B. Bush
Anne and Guido Calabresi
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Cavanagh
Carol Cheney
Peter and Diana Cooper
William and Jane Curran
Eleanore Drury
Stephanie Fitzgerald
Barrett and Peter Frelinghuysen
Christopher Getman
Suzannah and Thomas Graedel

Barbara and Augustus Kellogg
Harvey Koizem
Bruce and Jean Lewellyn
Lawrence Lipsher
Carleton and Barbara Loucks
Mr. and Mrs. Donald Marsden
Phyllis McDowell
J. Edward Meyer
Sarah Ohly
Timothy O'Meara
Elisabet Orville
Janette and Henry Parker
Herb Pearce
Sam Peterson
Patricia Pierce
Renate Recknagel

Joseph Ryzewski
Leigh Shemitz
Joanne Sciulli
Shavaun Towers
James Travers
Bernard Weintraub

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS

The City of New Haven
Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
Historic Wooster Square Association
Robbins-DeBeaumont Foundation
U.S. Forest Service

URBAN ISSUES

SPRING
2003
VOL. 13, No. 2

**Newsletter from
New Haven /
Urban Resources Initiative, Inc.
at the
Yale School of Forestry &
Environmental Studies**



Printed on Recycled Paper



**NEW HAVEN / URBAN
RESOURCES
INITIATIVE**

205 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT
06511-2189

T: 203 432.6570
F: 203 432.3929
www.yale.edu/uri

NON-PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 470
NEW HAVEN