

URBAN ISSUES

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



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

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Photo:

**by
Chris
Ozyck**

Native Americans practice a seven generational approach to planning. They consider how the actions of one person today affect the lives of many a century or two in the future. URI's Community Greenspace Program seeks to apply this concept in New Haven, a modern city that, like many, has managed to rebuild entire sections of its downtown in less than one generation. URI recognizes that trees can be some of the longer-lasting assets a resident, neighborhood, business or city can own. They stand through change and will only appreciate over time. Luckily, New Haven, the "Elm City," is blessed with a long history of forward-thinking tree planting. Over seven generations ago, James Hillhouse, a Senator, major city figure and civic planner, had the vision to plant elms around the Green at a time when most cities had few, if any, trees at all.

The majority of New Haven's large streets trees today were planted two or three generations ago, and New Haven continues to boast a healthy tree network. Over the years, the city and its neighborhoods have learned the value of planting and protecting trees for future generations. Indeed, today we can observe a growing movement of citizens actively engaged in the protection and care of public spaces and resources. These are the people that have donated land for parks and have fought to protect it from development; the people that plant and care for street trees; the people that fight pollution and polluters; and the people that turn derelict lots into gardens and greenspaces. These individuals and groups all have one thing in common: they
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FROM THE DIRECTOR

NEW HAVEN / URBAN RESOURCES INITIATIVE, Inc.

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Urban Issues

Erica Schroeder, *Editor*

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Area residents in inner-city neighborhoods are less likely to receive environmental benefits and services – instead, environmental burdens that are the result of a derelict landscape, affect the health, and well-being of people in the area. Poor air quality contributes to the asthma epidemic, as does peeling housing paint (particularly on abandoned structures), which pollutes soils with lead adding to the illness of childhood lead poisoning. Human health problems are just one example – other problems such as crime and declining property values, are also commonly faced by communities whose landscape is neglected. Undoubtedly growing up in a physically abused landscape affects the self-esteem of a child though this may be impossible to quantify. URI seeks to remedy such burdens by responding to citizen interest to reclaim the disused patches of their environment.

This year marks a decade of our Community Greenspace program in which URI has worked with hundreds of community groups to recover neglected areas in their neighborhood. Over this period of time URI has continually sought to increase our understanding of the most effective ways of supporting citizens' goals, so that they reap the potential benefits of the environment.

As we reach the ten-year mark of partnering with citizens, city government, and the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven to improve the environmental quality and social cohesion of our city, we have a great advantage to understanding the challenges of stewardship and sustainability. Twelve or twenty-four month funding cycles have not limited our Community Green space program, which so often is the case in the non-profit world where resources are provided through charitable giving. Having a ten-year window to work with citizens at their pace – not the grant cycle, but at a rate that responds to the capacity of the community – has been a remarkable opportunity. In the cover article URI's Green space Manager, Chris Ozyck, describes the challenge of on-going stewardship, which is central to sustainability and to connecting people to their surrounding landscape.

By participating in the six-city Urban Ecology Collaborative, URI is continuing to share our understanding of citizen-led stewardship and to learn of how to better engage more citizens. In her article, Jocelyn Hittle writes about our plans to undertake Citizen Forums in each of the six cities to create opportunities for grassroots groups to share outreach strategies with each other. Through this dialogue process the optimal ways to engage their fellow neighbors in stewardship activities will emerge. Our newsletter editor, Erica Schroeder, uses images of the Park on Nash to illustrate the evolution of the community's role in recovering a vacant lot and then shifting to carry out ongoing stewardship.

Kids are the key to a sustainable future; they are the next generation of environmental stewards. In our Open Spaces as Learning Places environmental education program, our board member Susan Swensen has introduced places like the Park on Nash to school children, and to the citizens who are environmental steward role models. URI intern Nao Teshima interviews Susan to explore how environmental education lays the foundation for the formation of a stewardship ethic.

Whether we are learning from our alumni who have been participating in urban ecology panels this year (see Amy Shatkin's article on page...), from our colleagues in the six-city Urban Ecology Collaborative, or from our citizen partners through Community Green space, URI remains dedicated to finding the best means of supporting people's connection to nature. Just as the neighbors of Nash Street are committed to maintaining the Park on Nash – URI is committed to our mission of empowering citizens to take care of the environment.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

Encouraging Community Stewardship in New Haven

(continued from page 1)

want a safer and healthier environment for the neighborhood and their city. They are the modern stewards of the urban environment.

It takes a unique individual to take time away from a hectic life to work on protecting, caring for and enhancing the urban environment, someone who recognizes the many values of plants and open spaces to a neighborhood and city. URI is fortunate to have many of these individuals as participants in the Greenspace program. Greenspace groups take an asset-based approach to their local environmental problems and improvement ideas. That is, groups identify which assets, such as greenspaces or street trees, they wish to protect. Then, participants identify and remove liabilities, like weeds or broken infrastructure. By providing funding, materials, and guidance, the URI is able to assist New Haven's residents in protecting and enhancing their natural resources.

As more and more people become aware of the services provided by natural resources, they are increasingly getting involved in the urban "greening" movement in some way. Trees alone provide a large variety of services, including but not limited to: providing shade for our houses; improving the filtration of storm water to make our rivers and harbor cleaner and healthier; slowing traffic in residential areas, helping to protect pedestrians; screening our houses from street lights, protecting individual privacy; reducing noise and air pollution; providing habitat for birds; and much more. As trees grow, they provide more of these services and consequently appreciate in value. Some cities have even used a healthy system of trees to raise their bond ratings.

Residents have seen that by making just a small investment of time on preventive care of street trees, park sites, restored lots and residential yards, they have helped their neighborhoods and city reap great benefits from its living environment. By caring for their local open spaces and natural resources, residents

essentially enter into an informal partnership with the city. They agree to maintain the land that city agencies have traditionally managed, such as parks, curb strips and sidewalks, vacant lots and other public spaces.

A decade ago, Urban Resources Initiative teamed up with the City of New Haven and the Community Foundation to develop the Community Greenspace Program. The partners' mission was to support residents in the environmental revitalization projects that they identified as a community. They distinguished three broad goals for the program: restoration, community building and stewardship.

Of the three, stewardship has been the goal most difficult to meet. Residents sometimes shy away from what they perceive to be a semi-permanent new commitment that they do not have time to integrate into their busy lives. Sustainability, the concept at the heart of stewardship, involves diligence, consistency, knowledge, humility, and effort. In short, it is a lot of work. The real heroes in our community are the women, children, and men who invest themselves and their time in the maintenance and improvement of what they already

have. Good stewardship like this encourages long-term investment in the area. Many of the Greenspace groups have used their work to show civic leaders their commitment to their community when discussing other neighborhood issues such as new sidewalks or new traffic measures.

In 2002, URI launched the Emeritus Program, a new initiative within the Greenspace Program designed to further promote the related goals of stewardship and community building. Emeritus groups have completed their primary restoration goals and have shifted emphasis to working on maintenance and community activities with continued assistance from URI. This past fall, the URI Board voted to concentrate funding on Emeritus and continuing Greenspace groups over focusing on new groups. This decision clearly exhibits URI's commitment to the hundreds of residents who have already partnered with the program.

URI encourages Greenspace participants to commit to maintenance prior to the initial planting, which helps ensure higher survival rates of those plantings. Considering the task after the planting usually results in little or no maintenance at all. URI has also recently shifted Greenspace maintenance trainings to the spring after finding poor
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Alumni Panel On Ecosystem Management

by
Amy
Shatzkin

The Hixon Center for Urban Ecology was established at Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in 1998 to support the students and faculty who wish to pursue research and academic study within this fast growing discipline. On March 1st of this year, the Hixon Center sponsored the second in a series of three alumni panels titled "Urban Ecosystem Management: New York City as a Case Study" as a forum for four alumni to share their experiences working as urban environmental professionals.

Over 40 students and faculty gathered in the Marsh Rotunda to listen as Fiona Watt, Jennifer Greenfeld, Alex Brash and James Jiler recounted how their range of interests and education at Yale enabled them to pursue unique careers in urban ecology. Professor Stephen Kellert introduced Watt and Greenfeld by acknowledging their heroic work to restore urban ecosystems. He noted that their efforts are "particularly important for a place like New York City," because it so often serves as a model for other cities across the country.

"Never underestimate the value of fellow alumni," Fiona Watt said as she began a presentation about her work as Chief of Forestry and Horticulture for the New York City's Department

of Parks and Recreation. Now responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of over 2.5 million trees, Watt's work with the city's Parks Department began in 1996 with a project to survey the city's entire tree population. As the city's chief forester, Watt is in charge of yearly efforts "to plant an enormous number of trees," maintain the city's existing trees, remove dead trees, conduct research on tree mortality, and track changes in tree density throughout city neighborhoods. Her work also includes supervising city greening projects including Green-streets, which converts traffic triangles to small park-like areas, and Operation ReLeaf, which has restored over 120 degraded landscapes within city playgrounds in the past two years.

Watt's greatest challenge, however, comes not from the sheer volume of her work, but from the Asian long-horned beetle, a species she dubs, "the single most disturbing trend in New York City in urban forestry." Combatting the spread of this devastating invasive pest is crucial to maintaining greenery in New York City. Watt estimates that the beetle has the potential to damage 47% of the city's trees – a loss estimated at 2.25 billion dollars.

As the Director of the New York Tree Trust, alumnus Jennifer Greenfeld

works with Watt in heading a public-private partnership within New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation's Forestry and Horticulture division. According to Greenfeld, she "works on a smaller scale to accomplish projects that can't be done on a large scale in New York City. Raising private money allows you to do things you wouldn't otherwise do – and also allows you to test out new techniques."

The community forestry programs that Greenfeld supervises include: Teens for Neighborhood Trees, an effort to use education and stewardship of urban teens as a tool to empower them; living memorials projects that create special plantings in memoriam of the World Trade Center disaster; Stewardship for Young Trees, which trains and equips New Yorkers to care for young street trees. Additionally, Greenfeld has received a grant to work in Hunts Point in the Bronx to create a community forestry management program that strives to address health concerns including asthma. With the help of summer intern Kyla Dahlin (F&ES '04), Greenfeld is also developing a pilot project to create forest management plans for small parks within New York City.

Professor William Burch introduced the next two panelists by emphasizing their commitment to people as well as trees, quipping that "you can love people and still relate to nature." In their student days, Burch worked with both Alex Brash, now Chief of the Natural Resources Group for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and James Jiler, the Director of the Horticultural Society of New York's GreenHouse program.

Brash began his presentation by saying that everyone should work in cities because "urban ecology is exciting and a great place to go to." According to Brash, working on ecology in a city is not only "cutting edge," but provides unparalleled exposure to partnerships and financial resources that enable ideas to be put into action. He also noted that since much of environmental policy is driven by popular sentiment and politics on the east and west coasts, "the foundation for policy is the urban environment."

"It's been fabulous through time to find out what people are doing," said Brash,

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Alumni Panel On Ecosystem Management

(continued from page 4)

who noted that he is constantly in contact with many of his fellow F&ES alumni, beyond just those from the Parks Department. Before assuming his current position, Brash worked for the Parks Department as a financial analyst and also as an operations manager in charge of the Urban Ranger program, which provides environmental education programs through out the city's parks. Brash now manages the Natural Resources Group, which is in charge of the "natural areas" that comprise 30 percent of New York City parks. The group works on acquiring new areas, the preservation of existing areas, and environmental monitoring of other agencies.

Brash is working to create "a standardized system for how ecosystems are monitored" and to address the challenge of creating a quantitative assessment for an ecosystem. Indirectly, his group is involved in all phases of restoration on \$95 million worth of projects, many of which are partnerships. The majority of the restoration projects are in salt marshes on the city's edge and in restoring eroding hillside and drainage slopes across the city.

"There's some unfounded statistic that says that some alumni from every class goes to jail," joked James Jiler, who runs the GreenHouse gardening program at New York City's Riker's Island Prison. The Horticultural Society of New York sponsors Jiler's program as a way to transform a population that most people consider a "resource sink" into a resource that makes "people part of larger community structure." Jiler formerly worked in community forestry programs in India and now uses his outreach and green thumb to teach 125 inmates a year horticultural training skills.

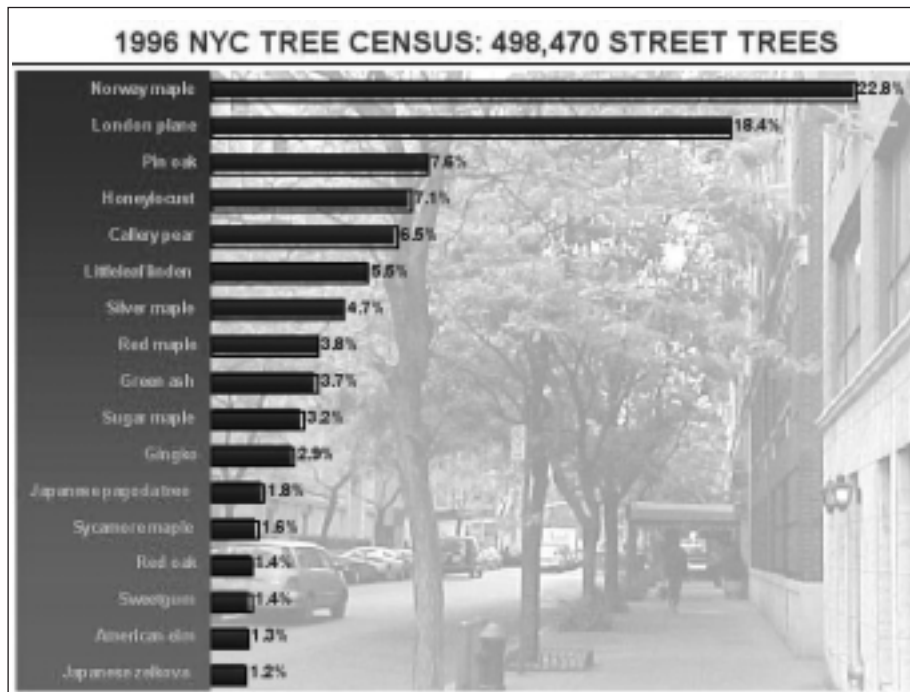
After screening a documentary about the GreenHouse project, which appeared on the CBS program Sunday Morning, Jiler helped explain why the program was such a success. After inmates are released, GreenHouse works with individuals to provide them with further job training, counseling and transitional work opportunities. Preliminary figures indicate that five to ten percent of GreenHouse participants are repeats offenders, as opposed to nearly 65 percent in the general prison



population. Currently, Jiler is working on compiling the data from the program's six years of operation to get a more complete profile of the program's success.

During the question and answer session, Brash and Watt said that the central paradox of urban ecology is that there is a plethora of information about a field of study that is just beginning to find acceptance within the academic framework. While the work of all of

the panelists could potentially provide research and monitoring data for scientists, few actually utilize this information. By the panel's culmination, each participant acknowledged the continuing need to further study urban ecology, a topic that is the subject of the final Hixon Center alumni panel on April 19th of this year. And as Burch noted, in an increasingly urbanized world, this will continue to be a ripe opportunity for students.



Stewardship at Nash

by
Erica
Schroeder



Photo:

The Nash Street site before any significant work had been done on it.

While each Greenspace site is unique, with its own set of successes and struggles, all of the sites face one challenge in common: site maintenance and stewardship. Once the group has accomplished its initial goal, group members often find it difficult to stay motivated about the site. It is much easier to rally a neighborhood around the idea of creating a park than it is to bring people

out to weed for hours or mow the grass. Various sites further along in their development, like the Park on Nash, have adopted different strategies for dealing with this problem

Although the Park on Nash is undeniably a very successful site, the Nash Street neighbors have nonetheless wrestled with stewardship issues. Like many Greenspace sites, the Park on Nash has a core group of neighbors that have

consistently worked on it since its inception in 1999. At the start, the group had several special projects around which to rally their other neighbors. They built the brick path into the park together with bricks gathered from neighborhood chimneys that were being taken apart. Similarly, the neighbors constructed the stone wall that runs alongside the entrance and into the park itself out of stones from the old site and from around New Haven. The group has also built several benches, a gazebo, a barbeque and a storage shed for the site. Planting days generally had good turnouts as well, and the Park quickly took shape.

However, now that the infrastructure for the park is for the most part in place, the Nash Street neighbors have begun to face dwindling participation in basic but necessary maintenance activities for the park, like watering, weeding and general park clean up. There are certain aspects of the park, like the choice of plantings, that were designed with these problems in mind. Many of the plants in the park were picked because they required less care. For example, the asters and black-eyed Susans at the front of the park choke out weeds on their own, and therefore do not require as much human labor to maintain them. They are also hearty plants able to withstand children playing around them.

Children at play also inspired the neighbors to convert a pond that was initially in the park into a marsh area. The neighborhood children were eager to chase the fish in the pond and ended up trampling plants around and inside the water. Therefore, neighbors decided to let the pond devolve into a marshy area with bog plants able to stand up to games of hide and seek.

Along with this sort of ecological and infrastructure planning, the Nash Street neighbors have also demonstrated the importance of group events to encouraging site stewardship.



The Park on Nash as it looks today.

Stewardship at Nash

Throughout most of the year, the park hosts frequent parties. In the spring and summer, the barbeque is fired up and neighbors turn out to eat together. During the fall, events like the annual Pumpkin Carving are organized. These events strengthen the community by providing a reason for neighbors to come out and interact with each other. At the same time, they also bring residents into the park, reminding them of the importance of the greenspace and hopefully of their responsibility to help maintain it.

Regardless of these efforts, the Nash Street neighbors still must work hard to keep neighbors committed and participating in the maintenance of the Park on Nash. Ron, one of the members of the core group of neighbors on Nash Street, brings up the specific issue of absent landlords on the street. Though these landlords have benefited from the Park through increased property values and higher rents, they have contributed nothing to the Park itself. Their tenants, though good neighbors, are generally also not invested in the Park. The neighbors are still figuring out how to address this. At a more basic level, however, the group is constantly looking for ways to get the many people who use the park to take on the stewardship responsibilities.

Though most Greenspace sites experience stewardship problems at different times and in different ways, they all eventually face this same general challenge. As groups develop different solutions, URI will facilitate an exchange of ideas on how best to encourage stewardship. If groups can combine efforts, then the task may become less daunting and success more secure.

Erica Schroeder is a Masters of Environmental Management candidate at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. She is the editor of Urban Issues.



One of the many barbeques held at the Park on Nash. Here the Park is in the middle of its development.



A view from the marshy area in the park where a pond was formerly located.

Dedication to Environmental Education: An Interview with Susan Swensen

I met Susan Swensen last fall when I began working as an education intern for the Open Spaces as Learning Places (OSLP) program. Every week I would look forward to spending a few energy-filled hours teaching (and learning) with elementary school students about the wonders of the urban environment. Part of my eager anticipation for each lesson was because I was able to work with Susan and watch her exercise her natural talent as a teacher. As a novice, I always felt a little anxious before each lesson, but I knew that Susan was there to back me up if something went wrong or if my mind suddenly went blank.

Susan has become a model and mentor for me as I work toward my own goal of being an environmental educator. She has a Masters degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and has been involved with environmental education at URI for over a decade. Her dedication to environmental education has been one of the driving forces behind the success of the OSLP program. Susan has been a URI board member since 1991 and has a lifetime appointment as a New Haven Parks Commissioner. In addition to her teaching and leadership experience, Susan also works as a wildlife rehabilitator, rescuing and caring for many injured and lost animals.

Though she continues to serve as a member of the URI Board, Susan decided this year not to continue in her position as OSLP Education Coordinator in an effort to continue challenging herself and expanding her experiences. As she passes on her position, I took the opportunity to speak with her briefly about her experiences as an environmental educator, the role she has played in the OSLP program and where she hopes to see the program go in the future.

* * *

Nao Teshima: How did you become interested in urban environmental education?

Susan Swensen: I saw urban environmental education as a way to share my love of nature with children who had little exposure to the outdoor environment. I wanted urban kids to recognize that nature is all around them even in a city and to appreciate the natural resource opportunities offered in New Haven's extensive park system and other open space areas. Over the years, urban environmental education has allowed me to introduce children to a "new world" that they had access to all along but didn't know existed. Exploring the outdoor environment with a group of children and watching them revel in the excitement of simply being outside is very rewarding. It makes you look at nature through their eyes and revisit the sense of wonder and enthusiasm you had as a child. I learn from children every time I teach them.

NT: What do you find to be the most challenging part of environmental education?

SS: Environmental education is very unpredictable. Groups of students vary greatly from one school, grade or classroom to the next. I like to incorporate activities with different teaching-learning styles and have additional ones planned in case I need to take a slightly different approach with a particular group of students. Class size is another issue, especially outside, but splitting up the group and alternating activities usually takes care of the problem. Students often require individual attention because of behavioral problems, special needs and preexisting fears of the environment. I try to turn these children into helpers and make time for one-on-one contact so they learn to participate in a positive way.

Nature is also full of surprises. Weather is always a concern so I plan an indoor alternative for an outdoor program and flip flop lessons right up to the last minute. Getting

the children out for a scheduled field trip is a priority since they are so disappointed when it is postponed. I've been known to have materials for up to four different programs in the back of my car ready to go because of scheduling conflicts. Nature walks, sampling activities, tracking expeditions and bird watching are often a gamble. There is no guarantee that you will catch or see what you planned for a lesson. Collecting samples ahead of time, placing nature artifacts along a trail or using realistic models can compensate for uncooperative critters and outdoor conditions.

With environmental education, I'm always prepared to drop everything for unusual sightings and unexpected events. It's often the least planned activity that's the most memorable. One of my favorite examples involves following deer tracks in Edgewood Park. I was so focused on a trail of tracks that it wasn't until the students repeatedly said, "Miss Susan! Miss Susan!" that I finally looked up. I saw them pointing up the trail and I froze as they whispered, "The deer's right there!"

NT: How did the idea for OSLP begin?

SS: Over the years, URI consistently offered strong support for environmental education but the program was always somewhat peripheral to the mission of the organization. OSLP was proposed as a way of establishing a more direct connection between environmental education and URI's Greenspace Program. Building on the theme of stewardship, the OSLP design incorporated Greenspace sites into the environmental education program to show children that people can have a positive impact on the urban environment and in return, OSLP benefited the Greenspace Program by raising awareness of Greenspace sites in a way that might lead to increased participation.

Traditionally, URI environmental education programs were somewhat peripheral to the organization. The

Dedication to Environmental Education: An Interview with Susan Swensen

URI Board was always very supportive and pleased with the success of the projects but there wasn't a direct connection between environmental education and the goals of the organization. In order for environmental education to become an integral part of the organization, the programs needed to tie in more closely with URI's mission. The Greenspace Program was the logical connection. If we incorporated the Greenspace Program into our environmental education programs, it would strengthen the projects and the organization.

So often, children are presented with a negative view of the environment. They are told about all the ways that people harm the environment. It all seems so hopeless! The Greenspace Program is a wonderful example of communities working together to improve the environment. A visit to a Greenspace site is a shining example of residents having a positive impact on the local environment. The Greenspace Program shows that people can make a difference!

At the same time, the school program could benefit the Greenspace Program. Targeting schools around the Greenspace sites would raise awareness among local residents and strengthen the constituency for the Greenspace Program. During our past environmental programs, we observed an increase in student participation in park improvement projects, clean up and events that carried over to family and friends.

I realized that everything could be incorporated into a single comprehensive program. By targeting different open space areas in the local environment, it was possible to slowly introduce students to the outdoor environment, incorporate the Greenspace Program into our environmental education efforts, cover a wide range of ecological concepts and expand our outreach city-wide by creating a model that could be used in different communities.

NT: What were the original objectives for the program and have they

changed over time?

SS: OSLP objectives have remained the same since the program was first developed. OSLP connects students to the local environment using different types of open space to illustrate a wide range of ecological concepts. OSLP ties urban youth to natural systems, showing change as basic to life with ecological quality improved or degraded by human action. OSLP empowers students to see themselves as environmental stewards, instrumental in shaping the future of the world around them.

NT: What methods were used to choose the different sites and topics?

SS: Site selection is an ongoing process as OSLP expands into new neighborhoods throughout the city. The Greenspace Program is the key component in choosing OSLP locations. OSLP focuses on neighborhoods with a strongly established Greenspace sites and schools are selected that are in close proximity to the site. Targeting students that live near a Greenspace site encourages stewardship among neighborhood children and their families. Teachers benefit by being exposed to a natural resource within walking distance that can be used as an outdoor classroom. The curriculum provides lessons for specific Greenspace sites that include a detailed history of each site.

NT: What are the strengths of the OSLP curriculum?

SS: OSLP's neighborhood focus on promoting stewardship for local resources applies city-wide. The curriculum adapts to showcase the strengths of open spaces throughout New Haven. Program participants learn to appreciate all that their city has to offer and recognize that they can play an active role in shaping its future.

NT: Where would you like to see OSLP go from here?

SS: URI has always hoped that OSLP would become institutionalized through a strong partnership

with the Board of Education. The collaboration would extend OSLP's outreach potential and secure funding for long-term programming. OSLP might also develop into a year-round program. Tapping into the summer months when Greenspace sites are especially active could improve stewardship. In addition to connecting OSLP to summer schools and camps, a series of family programs might be offered to extend OSLP to all age groups. Winter training programs for teachers that build skills and offer ideas for expanding on the core curriculum might encourage teachers to take a more active role with environmental education. Another possibility is for OSLP to become an interdistrict program by targeting open space sites within a watershed or along the Farmington Canal Greenway. The OSLP program has potential to expand in many new directions. I look forward to following its progress.

* * *

Susan's energy and creativity will be missed in the daily teachings of the OSLP program, but she will continue to support the program by remaining an active member of the URI board. All of us at URI wish her great success in her new projects and pursuits.

Thank you, Susan!

Nao Teshima is an education intern for the OSLP program. She is currently a Masters of Environmental Management candidate and is working toward her teaching certificate in Yale's Teacher Preparation Program.

Urban Ecology Collaborative Partners

by
Jocelyn
Hittle

Meetings of the Minds: *Building Effective Outreach Through the UEC's MERGE Program*

Many organizations, community groups, and individuals work to improve urban forests and green-spaces to enhance both the biophysical aspects of the urban landscape and the social health of the community. Often, those that are working on urban community forestry projects have difficulty recruiting others in the community. Meaningful inclusion of diverse communities is one of the greatest challenges facing urban community forestry today.

As part of the Urban Ecology Collaborative (UEC), URI is embarking upon an exciting new project geared toward increasing the ability of grassroots organizers to do effective outreach to other groups and individuals in their communities. The objective of this project is to address the challenge of including more community members at all the stages of a community forestry or restoration project, from initial planning to ongoing stewardship.

The Urban Ecology Collaborative is addressing this challenge by launching the Methods for Engaging Residents and Grassroots in the Environment (MERGE) program, an initiative designed to improve the outreach capabilities of community groups and individuals involved in community forestry projects. Through the MERGE program, UEC organizations will work with inner-city grassroots partners to identify effective strategies for outreach and community engagement. The organizations will then develop and implement urban restoration activities utilizing the new outreach strategies. Using funding from the Forest Service's Forestry Innovation Grant Program, the MERGE project participants hope to address the priorities of the community members while creating or improving methods for successful outreach to larger numbers of neighbors and community members.

The MERGE project will begin with informal interviews conducted in each of the UEC member cities. The purpose of these interviews will be to learn more from community members about the issues such as crime or safety that they view as priorities. This will be done by conducting interviews with random citizens not necessarily involved in community "greening" activities. From these interviews MERGE groups will create a list of concerns that will help to frame the second step in the process.

This second stage will involve creating an opportunity for a dialogue among volunteers through hosting local forums in each of the six cities. During the exchange of ideas volunteers will create new messages about the environment that relate to the concerns and priorities identified by the interviews. The New Haven Ecology Project and URI are reaching out to a wide variety of organizations across our city to invite their participation in a forum in May. Across New Haven many volunteer groups and non-profits – ranging from Greenspace groups, to Solar Youth, to the Environmental Justice Coalition, to the New Haven Garden Club – have environmental interests, and all will be invited to our local forum in order to enrich the dialogue and improve networking. The forums will create an opportunity for discussion of outreach methods that each of these groups employs.

One issue that will be addressed in the forums is the difficulty many communities face in maintaining the initial levels of participation in community forestry projects. It tends to be easier to recruit community members to attack a specific problem, such as crime or an unsightly vacant lot. It is often more challenging to encourage and maintain community members' continuing involvement as stewards or advocates once the initial problem has been addressed. Through the forums, community organizers that have had success in maintaining participation levels over the long term can share their methods for encouraging ongoing involvement. Following the forums, community

based restoration projects will be carried out in each city using the outreach tools identified during the forums. The projects will provide an opportunity to measure the success of the forums in identifying effective methods for improving grassroots outreach.

The MERGE project seeks to increase the outreach capacity of grassroots community organizers and to empower them by recognizing that they have ideas that work. It will give grassroots organizers a forum in which to share outreach strategies with other organizers with similar priorities. Through the sharing of ideas, each participant will leave with an increased capacity to engage their neighbors. In this way, the UEC hopes to increase participation in community forestry and better reach under-served populations in urban areas.

Jocelyn Hittle is a Masters of Environmental Management candidate at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. In addition to her work at URI, she is interested in land use and regional planning and is involved with the Lane Use Coalition at Yale.

The Urban Ecology Collaborative is a coalition of organizations in six cities that works to share community forestry information and tools. It is made up of organizations and agencies in Baltimore, Boston, New Haven, New York, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C. More information can be found at www.urbanecologycollaborative.org.

Encouraging Community Stewardship in New Haven

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attendance at fall training events. Though URI has had to make these changes to attract group members, many residents actually find that maintenance activities can be relaxing and rewarding, a preference that can hinge on nothing more than personality type. These activities also provide opportunities for neighbors to interact, which furthers the Greenspace program's second goal of community building.

Although difficult at times, stewardship activities have proven instrumental in encouraging resident interaction and

building a sense of community. The most successful groups have multiple strategies for engaging residents in these activities. The best tend to involve groups of residents working on set maintenance days. Some groups, like Orchard Street and Historic Quinnipiac, hold street wide clean ups a few times a year, generally followed by a picnic or block party. Other groups, such as Arch Street, collect dues from members of their block watch to pay for someone to mow their greenspace lawn.

The more than fifty Community Greenspace groups annually contribute in important ways to the success and stability New Haven's neighborhoods.

They represent hundreds of environmental stewards looking to the future. Often, their plantings are a major part of their neighborhood identity, softening architecture, creating sightlines, and providing beauty. They are a physical expression of the community's investment and care for its neighborhood, and the impact may well be present and thriving for seven generations to come.

Chris Ozyck is the Community Greenspace Manager at URI.

Many Thanks To Our Most Recent Donors

URI would like to thank all of our Community Greenspace groups for their continuing hard work on and commitment to improving their sites. Neighbors have labored tirelessly on a wide range of projects including streetscape improvements, public housing, parks and vacant lots. The efforts of these residents not only bring beauty to their neighborhoods, but also play an important part in environmental and community stewardship.

CURRENT COMMUNITY GREENSPACE GROUPS

Arch Street / Blockwatch 462
Artspace / The Lot
Atwater Street / Blockwatch 847 and 868
Beaver Hill Southwest Blockwatch Association
Beers Street
Bristol Street / Blockwatch 612
Button Street
Crossroads, Inc.
Daggett Street
Dickerman Street / Blockwatch 648
Downing Street / Blockwatch 855
Edgewood Mall
Elm-Platt Association
Essex Learning Center
Foxon and Essex
Friends of Chatham Square Park

Friends of New Haven Animal Shelter
Friends of Oyster Point / Blockwatch 416
Good Government: Farnum Court Committee
Goodyear Garden Club
Hill City Point N.A.G. (Greenwich Avenue)
Historic Quinnipiac Group
Historic Wooster Square
Hughes Place HI Neighbor
Ivy Narrow Bird Habitat
Jocelyn Square
Lenzi Park
Lexington Avenue and Howard Street / Blockwatch 912
Mechanic Street Mavens
Neighbors Unite on James
Newhall Street
Orchard Street Clean Up / Blockwatch 638
Park on Nash

Perkins Street
Plant A Seed Project
Plymouth Street / Blockwatch 419
Quinnipiac East Management Team Blockwatch 851
Read Street Garden Club
Rock Creek Community Group
Saltonstall / Lloyd
Sheffield Avenue
Sheldon Terrace / Blockwatch 751
Shepard Street / Blockwatch 657
Starr Street / Blockwatch 691
Watson and Bassett Gardening Group
Winchester Avenue/Blockwatch 729
Winthrop Avenue / Blockwatch 239
Wolcott and Lloyd Group
Yale-Chapel / Blockwatch 303