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URBAN ISSUES

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



Photo by Ian Christmann.

BANKING ON A GREEN INVESTMENT

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**by
Dylan
Walsh**

Volunteers wearing nametags and coordinated shirts huddled in a loose arc around the food and coffee. Clear autumn light slanted through the neighborhood street trees and the leaves glowed orange and amber. There weren't many trees. Soon there would be 50 more, a single morning's work on Tuesday October 23rd when TD Bank partnered with URI and the Alliance for Community Trees as part of TD Tree Days. A bright autumn day, lots of tree planting, a kickoff with Mayor DeStefano, Yale's Bruce Alexander, and others.

"How y'all feeling?" yelled Leland Milstein from the Alliance. On his cue, the group yelled back.

"Fired up!"

They repeated.

"I'm feeling fired up!" said Mayor DeStefano as he took the podium.

Before any of the work began, before any of the TD Bankers arrived, when the light cut at a lower angle and the air was cooler, URI interns and GreenSkills crew members readied for the influx of volunteers by arranging trees on sidewalks beside their pits, 30 of which were newly cut in September of 2012 by GreenSkills crew members. They organized tools and tarps in wheelbarrows. URI intern Gillian Baine and GreenSkills member Lamar Oliver alternated digging below the burlap that contained the root ball at the base of the tree. "We're looking for the root flare," said Lamar. "Where the tree becomes the roots. It's important you don't smother that underground."

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Urban Issues
Dylan Walsh, Editor

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A big group converged on October 23rd: volunteers from TD Bank and Alliance for Community Trees, Greenskills crew members, URI interns, city officials, Yale representatives, and other nonprofit volunteers. We planted 50 trees before noon in the Hill neighborhood, and that afternoon the group disbanded.

URI is built upon people coming together for a shared goal to improve the environment. The sweat equity invested to reach the goal creates lasting impressions on those who wield the shovels. The physical labor is often hard, and depending upon the group's ambitions can be a short one-day stint, or years of stewardship. But the legacy of this work persists. As the city around us changes, as people come and go, volunteers rise and fall away, the outcome of our work stands with a kind of permanence. TD Bank brought 50 volunteers together

for just one day. But the ecosystem services these newly planted trees provide will remain vital for decades to come.

In social bond and physical beauty the fingerprint of URI volunteers remains visible across our city.

Our Greenspace groups organize regular meetings for their communities to gather, plant, or perform basic upkeep and maintenance. The result of this labor expands well outside these prescribed periods: strangers become neighbors, neighbors become friends. The Greenspaces themselves come to symbolize people and their time together. Gwendolyn Heath, profiled in this issue, is one of our most enduring Greenspace leaders. In early 2004, when she moved into Fair Haven, she took the baton of leadership to maintain the ongoing Wolcott & Lloyd Greenspace site started back in 1996.

This summer, a new intern will be assigned to work with the Wolcott & Lloyd volunteers. Since the Community Greenspace started back in 1995, 124 Yale students have spent a brief summers in New Haven to learn and work alongside community volunteers. Our Hixon Fellows, too, invest a quick academic summer to produce research that feeds into the complex pursuit of understanding and solving urban environmental challenges. Although their research cycle is a brief period of time they make lasting and weighty contributions.

The Rock-to-Rock bike event, explored by Sachi Twine, sees hundreds of enthusiastic bikers join together in a ride from West Rock to East Rock. But before ever reaching the starting line the group raises thousands of dollars for local nonprofits. A one-day event, people joining to pedal, and the results will be felt far into the future.

The trees planted by volunteers are a tangible legacy of their marks on the landscape. They are monuments to which people can return, remembering the friendships forged and seeing the impacts that endure.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

Banking on a Green Investment

(continued from page 1)

But no luck. Gillian took a turn. Still no luck. Lamar again. He lit up. "I think this is it!"

"More art than science," said Gillian.

Neighborhood parents walked their children, or some children walked singly, to nearby Roberto Clemente Middle School. In the afternoon eighth graders were scheduled to plant 500 bulbs around the trees, which would stand newly upright on Frank and Lines Streets and Washington Avenue in the Hill neighborhood.

The uprightness of a tree is very important. Johanna Cartagena and Karl Stephens from GreenSkills explained then demonstrated to a group of volunteers the proper method of dropping a tree into a pit. After that they showed how to set the tree straight. One worker held the root ball steady – Johanna in this case – and two other volunteers retreated from the trunk at right angles to each other to eyeball tilt: left, right, hold? Karl stepped backed off the curb into the street and a sharp reprimand landed: "Don't stand in the street!" yelled Johanna, smiling. She said everything with intensity and light heart. Karl, also smiling, nodded slowly and walked around the tree to measure from the other side.

A few adjustments and it looked good. They were working very hard. One group hit unfinished concrete while readying the pit for planting, a rough protrusion of curb where there should instead have been dirt. They pounded away with a pickaxe. Tiny slivers of rock shot off, tiny puffs of white where the metal tip made contact. Fifty trees is a lot to plant in one day.

The GreenSkills crew directed as if a small corps of conductors asked to oversee the execution of a challenging symphony. Many moving parts came together, the product of six weeks' training that culminated in this day. They were teaching bankers how to plant trees. They had come a long way. They were rightfully proud.

And the ethic of TD Bank – not just donating money to pay for the trees,



Photo by Ian Christmann.

Mayor DeStefano alongside volunteers and URI GreenSkills crew members are charged up to start planting.

which it did do, but stepping further to donate the time of its employees, those who chose to come out – shown through in the effort of the volunteers.

"I was awake by six and in the office by seven to get a bit of work done," said Lisette Miranda from TD. "How could you not love volunteer days?"

Another volunteer, Stephen Francis, said the same, a sentiment born from the very first email announcing the opportunity: "It only took a moment to say yes. Psychologically, it's great to come out here and volunteer for our communities."

"It just feels good to get out and give back," said Stephen Tartaglia.

From a limited sample, the workers of TD Bank, from many different departments and many different branches, could agree on the value of volunteering.

And the community was grateful: An old resident pedaled slowly past on a small bike, one hand on the handlebars and the other holding his cellphone. He was in the middle of a conversation, weaving a bit at such a slow pace, when he dropped the phone from his ear and yelled: "Planting trees! Now *that's* a beautiful thing!"

"Yes, sir," said Roger Johnson, GreenSkills crew member.

Soon after, a car slowed, the windows slid down. "Hey!" yelled the passenger,

waving at Roger, signaling the tree and giving a thumbs-up.

"You're popular," said one of the TD volunteers.

When the morning dawned on Frank St., there was only one dead tree along the whole stretch. It would have to be removed. I noticed the absence. A street without trees compared to one with trees offers a very straightforward quantitative difference. But it also possesses a qualitative difference that, though not straightforward, is easily and immediately felt – a kind of lifelessness or hollowness. Only buildings.

Halloween decorations at that time of year went partway toward filling the space otherwise filled by street trees, but the fake skeletons, tombstones, and cobwebs were impermanent.

In the early morning, a resident on Frank St. stepped from his house, turned to lock the door, then walked out of his yard to his idling car. He looked up and down at the wheelbarrows, the tools, and the trees lain on their sides. He pulled open the driver door and sang off-key as he lowered himself into the seat: "Street trees! Street trees!"

When he returned from his job or errand or wherever it was that he drove off to, the refrain would be reality.

Dylan Walsh is the editor of the newsletter.

From Latin Kings to Blue Jays

by Hilary Faxon When Gwendolyn Heath moved into 168 Wolcott almost ten years ago, she had reason to be apprehensive. In the 1990s, the Latin Kings gang governed the neighborhood; and though a mid-decade crackdown had scattered the group, crime remained a major community issue. As a black woman, Gwen was a minority in a mostly Hispanic area. The dominant language on the streets was one that she did not speak.

Yet it is to those streets, and especially to the Wolcott and Lloyd Greenspace founded in 1996, that Gwen now devotes a tremendous amount of energy. Though she works a fulltime job, evenings and weekends find her outdoors beautifying, and this way protecting, her neighborhood.

Gwen first got involved with Greenspace after a neighbor, Migdalia Castro, recruited her to volunteer at the voting polls. Migdalia was working on a number of initiatives – voter registration, toys for tots, blockwatch activities – and encouraged Gwen to get involved. Gwen was interested, but hesitant to take a leadership role.

But a lifelong love of flowers, inherited from her grandmother, enabled Gwen to step up as a leader. She organized plantings in the Greenspace. She let children arrange the flowers and tried to take a hands-off stance, especially with the kids. “I let them set it up and say, ‘see what you think.’ I’ve gotta give other people the credit,” says Gwen. “It’s not my garden, but people think that.” Her modesty betrays a strong and continuous commitment to the Greenspace, a commitment that the neighborhood clearly recognizes.

Gwen is out there first thing in the morning, always during spring-cleaning, often throughout the rest of the season. Many nights she weeds and waters after work.

The men of the neighborhood on their porches, she has noticed, keep an eye her, the solitary woman working in the dark.



Photo by Rich Press.

Gwen Heath relaxing at the Wolcott & Lloyd Greenspace.

In the Wolcott and Lloyd neighborhood, safety is a serious concern. Gwen’s efforts to create a beautiful Greenspace are directly tied to her personal quest to improve the area’s security: Gwen is single woman living alone; she is a minority in the neighborhood; and she sees herself, as well as every other member of the community, as an individual with a set of rights and responsibilities. These rights are founded upon a single, simple obligation: respect.

The key to recognizing and working with respect is to let go of fear and judgment, she says. For example, as long as they clean up, Gwen allows a local crew to drink their beer in the community park – sometimes they even help her out with work. She always thanks those who contribute. She says she no longer fears for her safety in the streets. She urges her neighbors to take control of their wellbeing.

“I spend a lot of time encouraging people not to be scared. I say, call if you need public works or security...No one else is going to call.” Gwen takes responsibility for the neighborhood as a whole as much as she does for herself. She calls herself the neighborhood’s unofficial, one-woman blockwatch.

She feels a similarly diligent responsibility – a respect – for the maintenance of the Greenspace. While many residents and URI interns have contributed, she is the main, continuous advocate in its upkeep. “A couple of times I was going to give it up,” she says, “but if I give it up, it’s going down.” She cites more widespread participation as her top wish for the project.

The Greenspace may require a lot of organization and work among community members, but the outcome provides Gwen with small daily pleasures. “I can have a bad day, and I just come, sit down, and it takes away all the bad stuff,” she says. She brings sick friends to sit in the garden so they, too, can experience its healing qualities, enjoying the space she works so hard to cultivate. “See the birds... two beautiful blue jays... and it makes you feel good. It’s therapy.”

Hilary Faxon is a Master's of Environmental Management candidate at F&ES. She has worked for the URI high school Greenskills program since spring of 2010 and is now one of the program's field operations managers.

Rock to Rock, Tree by Tree

by Sachi Twine For a festive way to celebrate Earth Day this spring, come and join the fun at the 5th Annual Rock to Rock Earth Day Ride, a bike ride from West Rock to East Rock hosted by New Haven’s dedicated environmental non-profits. Since the first Rock to Rock ride in 2009, the event has doubled its impact each year, raising more than \$100,000 in 2012. As New Haven’s largest Earth Day celebration, Rock to Rock has set even higher goals for 2013, hoping to recruit 1,000 riders and raise \$150,000. The 20 participating organizations represent the city’s commitment to a wide variety of environmental causes, and include Friends of Edgewood, Friends of East Rock, and Friends of Beaver Pond, three volunteer groups that have been valuable and active members of URI’s Community Greenspace program.

The Rock to Rock ride has options for bikers of all levels and ages to get out for some fresh air and an exploration of New Haven’s parks. The event offers 8-mile, 20-mile, and 66-mile routes, each beginning with breakfast at Common Ground at the base of West Rock Park and ending at College Woods. Whether they’re joining the ride for a family-friendly adventure or a more difficult cycling challenge, participants can look forward to great food, live music, special exhibits, and opportunities to get involved in environmental activities throughout the day.

In addition to being an organizing partner for the ride, URI will be performing tree-planting demonstrations with Greenskills interns and volunteers at Edgewood and Beaver Pond Parks, the two rest stops on the 8-mile route. At these Community Greenspace sites, riders passing through will be able to catch their breath, decorate their bikes, and see URI’s environmental stewardship in action! After raising an impressive \$12,000 through sponsorships and pledges last year, the URI team is excited to ride again and gain support for our efforts to keep the city healthy, clean, and green. URI’s riders will be dressing up with a brand new T-shirt design to show our team spirit! All are welcome to join the URI Rocks and Trees Team!



URI’s Lorax Bike Team in 2012.



each other while building community values. Supporting healthy food, green jobs, environmental education, and land stewardship, the Rock to Rock ride is a powerful way to get outside with friends and family. Let’s all take a day in the saddle and appreciate the nature in our backyard.

Sachi Twine is a sophomore Environmental Studies major in Yale College. She is currently interning with URI as a Dwight Hall Urban Fellow.

Now in its fifth year, the Rock to Rock Earth Day Ride has become an inspiring New Haven tradition that we hope will continue to grow. The event brings together a diverse group of families, students, serious cyclists, community leaders, and more for a common goal – to celebrate and protect the planet and resources that we all depend on. More than just a celebration of the environment, the Rock to Rock ride is a celebration of community. By participating in this fun, action-packed day, New Haven residents have an opportunity to get to know the city’s beautiful parks, hard-working non-profit organizations, and



Hixon Fellows: Summer 2012

Molly Greene, Six students from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies received Hixon Fellowships for research on urban systems this past summer. Presented below are snapshots of four projects – narrow windows into the inextricability of city and nature.

Lisa Weber Grant,

Max Lambert,

Chris Shughrue

A Mountain by the Sea

Molly Greene

The town of Travis in Staten Island sits at the foot of the Fresh Kills Landfill, a site that served as New York City’s dumping grounds for more than half a century during the apex of America’s throw-away era. Currently, even as the looming twenty-story mounds ooze leachate and hiss methane gas, operations are underway to convert the site into a 2,200-acre public park. The plan is touted as one of the world’s most ambitious reclamation projects to date—a complete conversion of a wasteland into a “park of the future.” But this present reinvention is just the latest in what has been a long series of transformations. A reexamination of the cultural, economic, and political history of Travis reveals the influence of industrial growth on the American rural landscape, as well as a story of resistance, resilience, and adaptation by local communities.

The Wetland Payoff

Lisa Weber Grant

Encroaching development on natural landscapes is making the challenge of high-quality surface water increasingly important. This is perhaps best exemplified in urban stormwater runoff, which carries large amounts of nitrogen and other pollutants from fertilized lawns, septic systems, and ambient air. In New England, this polluted runoff contributes to deadzones in the Long Island Sound. Wetlands, including those that are manmade, may provide a valuable but understudied service by removing nitrogen from this runoff. My research objective this past summer was to evaluate the effectiveness of this service in order to ultimately



Landscape Sculpture, Fresh Kills Landfill circa 1970,

determine which variables are most important in wetland efficiency (e.g. water temperature or residence time of the water). Managers of Long Island Sound have set a goal of achieving a 10 percent reduction in nitrogen. If constructed wetlands are to play a role in this reduction, they must be better understood.

Trouble in Frog Suburbia

Max Lambert

In recent decades, research on endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) has grown rapidly. EDCs alter hormonal regulation and can have effects like increases in breast cancer proliferation in humans or infertility in female livestock. New work has found that male frogs in suburban neighborhoods have higher frequencies of endocrine disruption than frogs from other landscapes. As of yet we have limited knowledge of which contaminants occur in suburban waterways or their effects on early development. This summer I assessed sex ratios and hormonal levels in metamorphosing green frogs. I used GIS software to locate suburban (treatment) and forested (control) ponds in southern Connecticut, measured sex ratios, and then quantified hormonal levels among the frogs. The work demonstrated that endocrine disruption is occurring early

in suburban frog development and that these abnormalities are associated with unusual concentrations of trace elements and organic chemicals.

Information Shifting Landscapes

Chris Shughrue

Urbanization in the 21st century is increasingly shaped by distant flows of people, capital, and information across the landscape. In India, these flows are informed by the propagation of information across social networks, with rural-urban and urban-urban connections often underlying migration and investment patterns. These patterns shape and are shaped by the growth of city-regions. But how does the strength of these signals across social networks affect emergent patterns of urban land-use change? To examine this relationship, this summer I worked to develop a model for all of India that represents the decision-making dynamics between: land developers, families, state governments, corporations, and property management companies. Decisions made by family agents are based on information propagated across an adaptive social network. We varied the probability of data transmission across the network to simulate the effects of strong and weak social networks on spatial patterns of urbanization.

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