



by **Gilian Baine** **THE CARETAKER'S EPIDEMIC**

October first broke with gray skies and seemingly relentless rain—for many, the kind of weather that would inspire a day indoors. But it was a planting day, with three white pines and two velvet pillar crabapples scheduled to go in the ground at the corner of Ella T. Grasso Boulevard and Derby Avenue, where members of the Monitor Square Greenspace group had been working for over a year to restore a neglected site. Despite the downpour, I wasn't concerned about turnout. My first evening of work with the neighbors of West River, months before, had brought much worse—an electrical storm so intense that Chris Ozyck, Associate Director of URI, had called to remind me that the safest place to be was in the truck, parked, preferably not under a tree.

In West River, that last order is

becoming more difficult to follow with each passing year. Since 2009, the Monitor Square Greenspace group has been actively tending to the local urban tree canopy, planting over a dozen trees together and caring for twice as many that have been planted by others. The effort began when the group's founder and current leader, John Fitzpatrick, took stock of the time and energy he was investing in his own home and realized he ought to do the same in the neighborhood beyond his front door. In their first season the group planted five trees and installed a host of shrubs and perennials to beautify the park. The following summer volunteers continued work on the flowerbeds in Monitor Square and planted thirteen more

(continued on page 3)

In this issue:

The Storm's Aftermath 4

Building Bridges Under Bridges 6

The History and Future of Three Trees 7



FROM THE DIRECTOR

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

**Yale School of Forestry
& Environmental Studies**
Sir Peter Crane, Dean

**Hixon Center for
Urban Ecology**
Gaboury Benoit, Director

URI Faculty Advisor
William R. Burch, Jr.

URI Staff
Margaret Carmalt
Colleen Murphy-Dunning
Christopher Ozyck

**New Haven/URI
Board Members**
Josephine Bush, Chair
Nan Bartow
Claire Bennitt
Heidi Coutu
Gordon Geballe
Christine Kim
Meghan Knight
Lawrence Lipsner
Laurence Nadel
Sara Ohly
Britton Rogers
Andrew Ralph
Joe Ryzewski
Leigh Shemitz
David Streever
Betty Thompson
Harry Wexler

Urban Issues
Dylan Walsh, Editor

URBAN ISSUES
Fall 2011
Vol. 22, No. 2

www.yale.edu/uri



Nearly a decade ago, New Haven schoolchildren listened to a Nobel Laureate describe her childhood love of tadpoles and frogs, how, as a youth, she witnessed the long chain that connects these tiny creatures with the world around them: deforestation in her community contributed to soil erosion that clouded local rivers and, in turn, killed off the tadpoles and frogs.

Wangari Maathai spent the spring term of 2002 as a visiting scholar at Yale. Among her countless accomplishments, Wangari in 1971 was the first woman from East Africa to receive her PhD. Six years later she founded the Greenbelt Movement, one of Africa's most successful grassroots movements uniting environmental restoration with social uplift for women through the planting of trees.

"One can but marvel at her foresight and the scope of her success," said Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

While at Yale, Wangari enthusiastically joined the New Haven community. She recognized the links between her work and the work of URI — both seek to engage local groups in universal improvement. I marveled as I learned how she taught Kenyan women to gather the seeds of trees in the forest, grow seedlings, and then plant the trees for use as fuelwood and fodder. From this simple process Kenyan women drew income and political voice.

Wangari helped our Greenspace volunteers see how their efforts paralleled and reinforced the planting of trees by Kenyan women. She understood and promoted the straightforward fact that we are all bound and committed to each other through a single home.

Two years later, Greenspace volunteers called our office to express that they had heard the good news — as they put it — of our friend Wangari. She had won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her work on sustainable development, democracy, justice, and peace.

Since then, she worked with the United Nations to inspire the planting of more than 11 billion trees worldwide.

Upon learning the news that she had been awarded the Nobel Prize, Wangari spoke about her work:

It is evident that many wars are fought over resources which are now becoming increasingly scarce. If we conserved our resources better, fighting over them would not then occur...so, protecting the global environment is directly related to securing peace...those of us who understand the complex concept of the environment have the burden to act. We must not tire, we must not give up, we must persist.

In October, the world lost a selfless, grounded, and tireless woman — in short, a hero: Wangari passed away from cancer at the age of 71. Her legacy is immeasurable. In her spirit we dedicate this newsletter and its stories — stories of how simple service to the environment can bridge, inspire, restore, and revitalize the communities in which we live.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

The Caretaker's Epidemic

(continued from page 1)

trees. This year they focused on building a new garden at the corner of Winthrop Ave. and Derby Ave. and caring for their many past installations. In their three years, volunteers have logged nearly 600 hours of work in the summers alone.

As John relates the group history, his fluency in the neighborhood trees becomes apparent. I ask if he remembers his first planting, and he does, along with every tree he has planted with the group. He also names several contributions by interns of Greenskills, URI's green jobs training program. His narrative animates the trees as members of the community, family members, ancestors who have come and gone. John knows his species: he knows which hybrid elm was originally planted on Winthrop Ave.; he can tell you which variety was brought in after a car accident fatally damaged the first elm.

Such familiarity is perhaps inevitable, given the amount of time this Greenspace volunteer spends with the trees. John has personally shouldered the duty of ensuring that each new tree gets its proper care, making twice-weekly rounds during the growing season.

"All the credit belongs to my brother-in-law," John admits, as he points to the two fifty-five gallon drums in the bed of his blue Dodge Dakota. Before outfitting his vehicle, he had been watering over thirty neighborhood trees with buckets, by hand. With his shoulders wearing out, he realized he needed a new strategy. Now he mounts an electric pump on the truck's rails and secures it with bungee cords. A power inverter installed behind the seat of the cab allows John to run the pump with his truck's battery. The pump draws water out of the drums through two heavy-duty washing machine hoses (other hoses just kinked right up), then sends out a dual stream through a twin spigot hanging off the truck's right side. The result is a flow of thirteen gallons per minute.

John visits about thirty trees, and each tree requires twenty-five gallons of water per week in the stressful New Haven summers. Do the math, and you'll realize that watering those trees is a multi-trip operation for vehicle and operator. John



John Fitzpatrick explains his custom-rigged watering truck.

heads home or to Monitor Square to refill the drums, and ultimately spends close to ten hours a week on the job. It may not be immediately obvious why John — why anyone — would do this.

"The trees will transform the neighborhood," he assures me. "Without the trees, the blocks are barren. It just looks like somebody cares. If it looks like nobody cares, people will come and think 'I can do whatever I want here.'"

The effort has not gone unnoticed, and John's dedication is matched by the reliable participation of several neighbors, including Robin Arenberg and Frank Minja, who showed up every week over the summer—rain, shine, withering humidity or stifling heat—to clean, prune, weed, water, plant, and mulch. Frank has been attending on Saturdays ever since he noticed the group at work while out for a morning walk. "Next thing we know he's agitating to get this done!" John recalled, referring to Frank's pet project, the site at Derby Ave. and Ella T. Grasso Blvd.

"This is an awesome day," Frank told me, with the pines and crap apples securely in the ground and the noonday sun now pouring onto the lot. He was delighted to be making something beautiful of this sizable lot, where a sign reading "Welcome to West

River Community: A Gateway to the City of New Haven" had hardly been accompanied by a welcoming sight. The work wasn't glorious. It began with the removal of a damaged guardrail and a prolonged effort to have dead trees taken down and stumps chipped. More recently, Frank has been strategizing to secure a water source, contacting the Department of Transportation to keep the area mowed, and—last but not least—reaching out to URI for the trees.

John had earlier noted how empowering it was to work with Greenspace, which provides technical and material support for restoration projects. But something that communities must provide for themselves was visibly at play in West River: a contagion of stewardship. "It's an epidemic," John said. "You can see, I got Frank into it and now he's getting these folks into it." Sure enough, Frank was standing with two neighbors who had come out to help and admire the transformation. The three of them were busy setting up the watering schedule.

Gillian Baine is pursuing a Master's degree in Environmental Management at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. This past summer, she worked as a Community Forester with URI's Greenspace Program.

The Storm's Aftermath

by
Ben
Goldfarb

On the afternoon of Sunday, August 28, citizens of New Haven ventured outside their homes for the first time in 20 hours to observe the destruction wrought by Tropical Storm Irene. A tempest nearly as large as the state of Connecticut had passed over the city, leaving New Haven battered in its wake. Hundreds of homes sat powerless, downed branches rendered roads impassable, and dozens of trees lay capsized in the streets and parks, soil clinging to freshly exposed roots. Although New Haven had avoided the flooding that devastated many Northeastern communities, it was nonetheless confronted with a daunting restoration.

Yet for all the wreckage it left, the tropical storm, downgraded from hurricane status just before making landfall, also gave New Havenites an opportunity to serve their city. As Irene spiraled its way across New England, a small army of public employees and volunteers poured into the leaf-strewn streets and began to address the damages.

The silver lining in the aftermath was a reinvigorated unity among New Haven residents. The cleanup effort cemented the bonds, not always obvious, that connect civil servants, students, and citizenry.

The groundwork for the reparation was laid the day before the hurricane arrived. Hired crews entered the city and took up stations at local firehouses while city workers positioned themselves in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), an underground bunker straight out of a disaster movie. Elsewhere in the city, preparations took on an almost surreal aspect: the New Haven Parks Department spent the day removing 77 horses from the Lighthouse Point Park carousel and relocating the antiques in a concrete building. All over the city, residents stashed their lawn furniture, stocked their cupboards with canned goods, and filled their bathtubs in case of water outages.

Until the high wind conditions proved too dangerous for outdoor work, the EOC buzzed with activity, receiving a steady stream of damage reports and



Photo by Geoff Giller
A tree downed in the middle of a road in the East Rock neighborhood.

relaying instructions to the Police and Fire Departments, as well as the nearly fifty contracted crews around the city. "At one point I counted over 60 people inside the EOC," recalled Bob Levine, Director of New Haven's Parks, Recreation and Trees Department. "I was in the EOC for 36 hours straight. I didn't get out until the second day of the cleanup."

When Mr. Levine finally ventured outdoors, he found that New Haven was in better shape than he had anticipated. "We predicted that there might be a couple thousand trees that would be affected, but it turned out to be much less than that," Mr. Levine said. Indeed, considering the terrible flooding and property damage the storm inflicted in nearby towns, New Haven was considerably more fortunate. But, "it was still pretty bad," Mr. Levine was quick to point out. "You saw big trees that had broken onto houses, big trees uprooted on power lines. There was a lot of devastation."

The Parks Department set about clearing wreckage from roads, a task that would ultimately take three days to complete. This focus on the streets meant that

city agencies did not so much as enter the parks for ten days after the storm; responsibility for New Haven's green spaces fell to volunteers.

Within hours of Irene's departure, emails were flying from the EOC to the city's service groups. "A great way of maximizing resources was to organize the wide range of community groups that are already active in the city," said Becky Bombero, legislative director of the mayor's office and one of the people manning the phones in the bunker. The first call went out to the Friends societies affiliated with each of the New Haven's parks. Thirty members of Friends of East Rock Park showed up at College Woods to clear debris within a day of the storm; other Friends groups, such as Edgewood, had similarly strong turnout.

The cleanup made bedfellows of groups that might not ordinarily interact: for instance, Friends of East Rock found themselves working side-by-side with dozens of Yale College freshmen. Lauren Zucker, Associate Vice President at Yale and Director of New Haven Affairs, coordinated Yale's involvement in the



Photo by Geoff Giller
A New Haven resident volunteers his time for cleanup.

effort. Cityscape, the program Ms. Zucker directs, typically takes newly arrived first-years on informative bus tours of New Haven; Irene presented Cityscape with a unique opportunity to instead integrate students into New Haven through service.

"We quickly switched the focus of Cityscape to assist in the clean up of the city's parks after the storm," Ms. Zucker said. "We coordinated with the city and URI to identify specific parks that needed additional resources and coordinated our program around those efforts. We wanted to work in partnership with the existing neighborhood associations that were out there. It was a great opportunity to strengthen the students' sense of their local community while contributing to an important and needed civic endeavor."

The community, in turn, appreciated Yale's presence. "Friends of East Rock Park saw the storm as an opportunity to get Yalies involved in neighborhood affairs," said Justin Elicker, an alderman in East Rock and himself a graduate of the Yale Schools of Forestry and Environmental

Studies and of Management. "Students are sometimes so focused on where they're going that they forget where they are."

According to Mr. Elicker, the hurricane also pulled residents of his neighborhood into the fold. "When somebody shows up to a volunteer project, it's a great opportunity to educate them about what we do in the parks, and to enlist them for future volunteer events," he said. "People regarded it as a chance to help, and maybe some of them will return to help in the future."

The notion that helping to repair the city would strengthen citizen ties to it was widely echoed by those involved in the restoration. "I think people always have a deep commitment to the city, but the hurricane focused [that commitment]," said Ms. Bombero. "People who are engaged [sporadically] were all organized at the same time around a common interest."

Bob Levine agreed with that assessment, although he qualified it by

emphasizing that citizen volunteerism is nothing new. "The New Haven parks system is the recipient of thousands of volunteer hours every year, so [the hurricane] was just another example of people coming and helping," Mr. Levine said. "There are a lot of people in New Haven who have a strong connection to their parks and their neighborhoods, and we work with them all the time. I didn't exactly notice a change in behavior [after Irene], but it intensified people's desire to help." Most telling, perhaps, was the anonymous benevolence that proliferated throughout the city: several times, Mr. Levine saw trash bags full of debris deposited outside of parks that had not been targeted by any Friends group or formal cleanup, acts of magnanimity that could only be motivated by people's genuine devotion to the welfare and management of their city.

Despite the hard work of the city's employees and volunteers, the effects of Irene linger. A number of downed trees still lie across paths within the parks, and the black stumps of toppled street trees mar sidewalks. Erosion swept up to fifteen feet of land around Long Wharf into the Long Island Sound, and the destroyed dunes will require a tremendous amount of money to restore (although the city does expect support from FEMA). Irene's legacies in the Northeast will be disastrous flooding, property damage, and loss of life; and when we recall the storm, our memories should flash first to those tragedies. But in New Haven, at least, Irene had another set of impacts: the storm fostered community engagement, altruism, and citizen connection. Here's hoping those effects linger longest.

Ben Goldfarb is a Master's student at Yale and from Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. He graduated from Amherst College in 2009, and in 2011 conducted urban ecology research with the New York City Parks and Recreation Department.

Building Bridges Under Bridges

by
Adenike
Adeyeye

Dark, dangerous, unwelcoming: all words that were once used to describe the stretch of Humphrey Street that passes underneath I-91. Though this no-man's land physically connects the State Street and Jocelyn Square Park communities, its disrepair long signaled ownership by neither – a fact that neighbors worked together to change this summer. Motivated by a desire to create a more pedestrian-friendly walkway bridging the two neighborhoods, the Upper State Street Greenspace group rallied over 50 volunteers to reclaim the patch of land through tree planting.

Ben Berkowitz and Emma Richards, leaders of the Upper State Street group, spearheaded the effort. (Ben is also the co-founder of SeeClickFix, an online tool for empowering neighborhood improvement; Emma is a Community Manager at SeeClickFix.) Months before I joined them as their summer Greenspace intern, they worked with the Connecticut Department of Transportation, New Haven officials, and Chris Ozyck at URI to plan for concrete removal and tree planting. By the time I arrived in June, they had received approval for their plan, they had selected species to plant, and they were ready to begin.

Despite this precocious start, one nagging question remained, a question I was sure to be asked back at the URI office: "Who's going to water the trees?" Ben and Emma anticipated a degree of help from community members, but this was not a conventional planting: these trees would be far from people's homes, growing in a place generally viewed as barren and unfriendly. The Upper State Street group would have to attract volunteers to ensure stewardship. This would be no simple task.

Ben and Emma were master advertisers. They recruited friends and colleagues, posted notices on SeeClickFix, and attracted media attention. Innovative advertising ideas brought new members to the group. Kati Fredlund announced the group's regular Tuesday workday with a sidewalk chalk drawing in the underpass. "After seeing the chalk drawings, a kid from Jocelyn Square Park offered to come out and help water the



Photo by Adenike Adeyeye

Jesse and David make room for a tree by removing the first square of concrete.

trees throughout the summer," Emma explained. "That was pretty cool."

The best advertisement, however, was the volunteers — digging, planting, laughing, listening to music, and having fun. One bicyclist stopped by in our second week to ask what we were doing. Volunteers took a break from removing concrete to explain the project. They invited him to join.

Now concrete removal is not the most attractive prospect: after the Department of Public Works cuts an 8' x 8' slab of concrete into smaller squares, volunteers must pry out each 100-pound block of concrete with just a crowbar and a sledgehammer, exposing gravel and sand below. They must then excavate a foot of the gravel and shovel in topsoil to create a pit where the tree roots can grow and thrive.

The bicyclist, having heard the pitch, rode off, stopped at a nearby store, then disappeared for home with groceries. "Within 20 minutes he came back and grabbed a shovel," said Ben. "David came back every week this summer

to help us after that first day. It was awesome, and a perfect example of how this project helped bring communities together." That community spirit continues, even after the planting season. Upper State Street volunteers led by Ben continue to water the trees today. In the wake of Hurricane Irene, the Greenspace group converged to check on its trees.

Throughout the summer, people commented on how much the plantings were changing the underpass. Exciting, inspiring, green, and beautiful is how they came to describe the space. With a few months of planning and an abundance of enthusiasm, the Upper State Street group transformed and reinvented that small but important stretch of Humphrey Street.

Adenike, F&ES 2011, was a GreenSkills intern while studying at F&ES, and worked as a Greenspace intern last summer.



Photo by Adenike Adeyeye

A cherry tree brightens the gray underpass. On the back cover, the group plants its ninth and final tree

The History and Future of Three Trees

by
Amy
Zvonar

It was the last day of planting this summer and I was meeting the men in my Crossroads Greenspace group for the first time. Distinct from most Greenspace groups, the men who volunteer from Crossroads are enrolled in a full-time residential substance abuse recovery program. Their time on the campus is temporary, and so the volunteers who come out to work on beautifying the surrounding area change from summer to summer, week to week. Yet the participants' goals remain aligned with those of our other Greenspace groups: the men want to be outside, improve the area in which they live, and give back to their community. They also, of course, want to learn how to plant trees.

On this particular day, we had three trees to plant in a grassy strip located between the Crossroads campus and McConaughy Terraces, a public housing complex. The request had come earlier in the summer from one of the Terrace residents, but the trees were meant to benefit both groups. The Crossroads men pointed out that much of their living space faced the empty parking lot, and they would appreciate the shade and color provided by the trees. Excitement filled the group when we broke ground for the first two saplings.

It's not easy to plant three trees on a hot August day. The ground was dry and hard and rocky. The larger picture faded from view as the day wore on and the men wore out. I could tell they needed a morale boost, a reminder of why they had come to plant in the first place. With two trees in the ground, I retreated from the action and understood that a drastic transformation had taken place. Evidently, residents of McConaughy Terrace understood the same thing. As I thought about how to motivate the final planting, a resident from across the street excitedly crossed over, smiling broadly and anxious, it seemed, to talk with someone. As soon as she got within earshot, she let out effusive praise for the men and their work.

The men at first appeared slightly surprised by her excitement and gratitude. They did not realize that, in a few short hours, they had changed a barren grassy strip into a welcoming



The Crossroads team with two trees in the ground, one more to go.

shaded area. As she continued to talk with us, we began to understand why these trees were so important to the community. Ever since a construction project had removed trees from the space, the residents had wanted them replaced. A few had tried to plant small seedlings, but none survived. These three trees afforded the residents an opportunity to finally restore the area.

Before our companion left, she learned from our group how to help care for and water the trees. She would use the tree watering, she explained, as an opportunity to teach her grandchildren about care for living things.

The visible joy of this resident provided the positive force the men needed to finish planting on a high note. She had helped them step back and reframe the larger picture, notice the positive

changes they had wrought. She was, in short, the human connection anchoring their work.

I might see these trees only a handful of times during the rest of my time in New Haven. For these men, their limited time at Crossroads offers a short window during which they'll enjoy the trees. For the residents of the area though, these trees transformed their home. For as long as they stand the trees will connect McConaughy Terraces with the men who planted them and to the larger Crossroads community.

Amy is a second year at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. She will graduate in the spring with a Master's in Environmental Management.

It is easy to celebrate the tree, but here we celebrate the roots.

The wonderful work of our Greenspace interns is possible because of generous, consistent, and under-recognized support. For 15 years, the Office of State and New Haven Affairs at Yale, through its President's Public Service Fellowship, has been one of three essential sponsors for our Greenspace interns. The Yale Club of New Haven and alumni classes from Yale University have also been fundamental to the success of our

summer work. It is important to recognize their commitment, and to pronounce the depth of our gratitude. Thank you.

2011 Greenspace interns:

Gillian Baine,
Presidential Public Service Fellow

Adenike Adeyeye,
Yale Club of New Haven

Amy Zvonar,
Yale College Class of 1964

URI

**NEW HAVEN/ URBAN
RESOURCES
INITIATIVE**

195 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT
06511-2189

T: 203 432.6570
F: 203 432.3817
www.yale.edu/uri

**NON-PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 526
NEW HAVEN**

URBAN ISSUES

FALL
2011
VOL. 22, No. 2



Photo by William Kurtz

Printed on Recycled Paper