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# URBAN ISSUES

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



by  
Anna Ruth Pickett

## BIG-HEARTED LEADERS AND YOUTHFUL GARDENERS

Even though the Shepard Street block is an emeritus group that long ago met its planting goals and is no longer required to conduct outreach to new participants, the community leader, Ms. Jody Kelly, flyers and knocks on doors up and down her street every year. On June 1st, one home welcomed us with several small, curious eyes through the windows. "Mom, someone is here!" Ms. Kelly told them, "It's that time of year again. Everyone is welcome in the garden. Parents and kids alike."

We started off on Saturday afternoons and switched to Thursday afternoons when school let out. Kids were readily convinced to help in the garden. They loved hanging with their friends out-

side, getting mulch from the truck, and finding worms and bugs in the soil. Their parents were less interested. It wasn't until we were pruning high bushes or digging holes for new shrubs that a handful of adults came to the garden to pitch in. Mostly it was Ms. Kelly, who has been leading the Greenspace for over a decade, and the kids. And though busy with additional responsibilities like teaching summer school, Ms. Kelly did not miss a workday all summer.

Most of the Shepard Street kids are girls. Several are cousins who live a house or two away from the garden. The boys tend to come from farther down the street. Ms. Kelly and these

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I am obsessed with lists lately. Whether I am tracking the number of trees by species in our holding yard, or tracking requests for trees by neighborhood, it seems like I am endlessly tallying where we will plant in the coming days and where we stand against our goal of planting 1,000 trees this year.

Last October Mayor John DeStefano set an ambitious goal of 10,000 trees to be planted in New Haven over 5 years. Half of these are trees planted by URI on public land and supported by the City of New Haven; the other half are hopefully matched by the private sector on private property. In the spring we began by planting 275 trees with our GreenSkills interns. Over the summer, Greenspace volunteers added to the tally another 212 trees, leaving just over 500 to be planted this fall.

The Department of Parks, Recreation & Trees has asked that we plant some trees in our city's parks, but most plantings are in the curb strip in front of a house in response to a homeowner or renter request. In return for the planting, the requester must promise to water and care for the tree. Approaching the fall season, URI staff responded to initial citizen requests by checking sites and recommending species. We hired our largest crew yet of GreenSkills interns: 18 high school youth; 13 Yale interns; and 12 adult apprentices either enrolled in substance abuse recovery or on active parole. Our GreenSkills interns then hit the field to do the actual planting.

Our Community Greenspace groups, two of which are highlighted in this issue's cover article, are also active in the charge to plant 1,000 trees. Dedicated leaders and residents, whether young or old, have thrown themselves headlong into the revitalization of local public space, and of New Haven at large.

So we can list the groups, their responsibilities and contributions: residents request trees then care for and tend to them. GreenSkills interns commit time after school to plant trees. And the Greenspace leaders devote themselves to the development of their communities; they mentor younger generations and solicit help and give time to a cause much larger than themselves. But this exercise in listing, the collation of numbers, is in itself incomplete. At the end of the day, the numbers are not the central goal. I believe that each one of these newly planted trees is making important contributions to our environment, and that every tree will continue to improve our city as it grows. Putting my lists aside, equally important is the act of planting and, through it, how the men and youth involved have learned about the positive contributions they provide to their communities and to each other.

Here's to 1,000 trees.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning



# Big-Hearted Leaders and Youthful Gardeners

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**Mr. Scott peeks smiling over the original Watson & Bassett Greenspace group in 1998. Twelve years later (front cover) he's still hard at work and still smiling.**

kids are a living history of Shepard Street's garden, the constant caretakers who have tended it for years and watched it turn from a vacant lot into a lush Greenspace. The Watson and Bassett Greenspace garden, on the other hand, only a few blocks away, tends to attract a new set of kids each year.

At the beginning of the summer, a butterfly bush and Zelkova trees had overgrown the Shepard Street garden. Inspired by the Greenspace pruning workshop at the Westville Library, I biked to Shepard Street hauling a cart filled with pruners, shears, and gloves. Ms. Kelly was slightly skeptical. "What should the kids do while we prune?" I suggested the kids do the pruning while we watched closely. We had six kids that day, and after a thorough overview of safety precautions and demonstrations on proper pruning technique, three 8-year-olds were armed with tools and the other three, handed brown bags to collect debris, were sent as scouts to help find sore spots for pruning. Midway through, the pruners changed hands.

Several parents and uncles watched from chairs just outside the garden as Ms. Kelly and the kids worked together. One of the dads saw the kids

weren't tall enough to reach the butterfly bush's highest straggly branches. He put down his beer and offered to help. A final trim.

Participation at the Watson and Bassett Greenspace this year flagged until late in the summer when we found a spot to plant a tree and homeowners willing to help plant and care for it. The group's leader, Mr. James Scott, who started the Greenspace with a vibrant group of neighboring adults, has

proven a dedicated leader. He particularly enjoys working with kids, but the most heavily involved kids from summers past had moved away this year. We waited for new young volunteers to grace us with their presences. All it took was one big linden tree.

Three kids sitting on their porch grew wide-eyed as I pulled up on their block with a covered tree on board the truck. I had introduced myself to them months ago when knocking on doors with Mr. Scott. They had seemed interested at the time, but had not come out all summer. Today was different. They ran inside to get permission from their mom to come out and help. They reappeared and shortly thereafter were wielding picks and shovels and digging a hole. They dug enthusiastically and the labor inspired some inquisitive conversation. "Why does the hole have to be so big?" "How far will the roots go?" "What do the roots do?" They were surprised to see how large the tree was when it was eventually unveiled. My husband arrived on the scene late and I asked the kids to explain to him what the roots do. With wildly animated arms and sucking noises, Brandon imitated the roots' role in providing water to the tree.

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**Ms. Kelly takes shady rest with the youthful Shepard St Greenspace group.**

# Some Comments on Planting Trees

by  
**Dylan  
Walsh**

Trees are rich with metaphor, from the lowest reaching root to nested animals in the crown. They shift in season, they start willowy then grow sturdy and hardened, they bear fruits and nectar.

GreenSkills interns from Common Ground and Sound School strove to help with this year's ambitious planting goal of one thousand trees. They worked with determination and dedication – "through the hunger and thirst!" as one student put it. The GreenSkills instructors showed the ropes.

The work tends to instruct in a personal way, and the interns take unique lessons or thoughts or aspirations from what they do. These takeaways are not always explicit, so it becomes a useful exercise to sit down in an explicit way and think about them. We sat down for this purpose with the interns in late-October. Some of their thoughts are transcribed below.

If nothing else, it seems everyone agreed that planting is strenuous work: constant effort, teamwork, communication. You have to remove the tree from the truckbed, dig the hole, manage the soil, carefully position the root-ball with particular attention to the root flare, unwind the wire retainer, cut back the burlap, and so on and so forth. Amid all this, you needn't account for the weather: the show must go on.

Saplings grow as they are planted, so we should take care in our planting and our tending. Enjoy the quotations below.

## **Cheryl Bedard**

On the first day of work I was excited and anxious because I just wanted to start digging! Since that first day, I have learned GPS skills and how to identify trees. I have also become a better leader and I contribute hard work, teamwork, and communication.

## **Christina Cavallieri**

I've learned how photosynthesis works – how trees take in carbon dioxide and convert it into oxygen, and how the sun helps them create their own sugar. On the first day of work I was thinking of having fun and how to make the day fun for my friends who work with me. And what I bring to the job is that I make everyone laugh somehow.

## **Lindsey Spears**

On the first day of work I was skeptical about planting. I hated worms and getting dirty. I've gotten better at working with other people and building skills along the way. I've learned that there are hundreds of types of trees in New Haven. I find myself naming trees while riding in the car. As an employee, I have learned that it takes hard work to do some of the stuff I've done at URI. It will help you learn that working in other places is no joke. You have to be on time and work well with others.

## **Vonte Jones**

I've learned how to be a little more patient. Even when I'm tired, I just go on to the next hole. "Save the complaining for lunch break!" I've also learned that the workplace can be fun – you can do your work while talking and enjoying yourself.

Two ways that I show leadership are by helping teammates stay on task and making people laugh!

## **Yamaris Sanchez Rodriguez**

One thing I learned through GreenSkills is that there are all these different things you need to do when planting a tree! I thought you just dig a hole and put the tree inside, but now I know that there are so many steps necessary. And I've shown leadership by thinking ahead when preparing plans so that the work goes smoothly. It is also important to collaborate with others, to encourage teammates when they are struggling, and to take ownership of mistakes.

## **Alicia Nixon**

I bring to the GreenSkills job a positive attitude to help my teammates out, and I lead by lending a helping hand to whoever needs it. With GreenSkills I learned that every job has a meaning.

## **Terrance Walker**

The project has really helped me by making me leave my comfort zone. I am also getting used to and better at teaching others





## Some Comments on Planting Trees

(continued from previous page)

to plant trees, even though I would rather just plant them myself.

### **Bryan Lewis**

I've gotten better at teamwork and determination. On the first day we moved a giant concrete block that was in the way, and it felt great! Along with determination I contribute my kindness and readiness to help someone out when they need it. Plus my super speed!

### **Morice Smalls**

On the first day, I felt this was going to be a huge challenge. I learned over time that people appreciate what we are doing.

### **McKale Mullen**

Helping teammates stay on task is a big part of the job – and having teammates keep you on task. I also learned to work hard and not give up. These green jobs are like raindrops, or like when you're

tired and you get that nice cold Gatorade: refreshing!

I've gotten better at talking and communicating and being patient with others, and I also learned to think before I act or react. I've shown leadership with determination, by setting an example. You have to work hard and stay focused even through the hunger and thirst!

### **Shakia Cox**

On the first day of work I was happy because I was with people I know and we had new work, and I was able to teach my new teammates how to work with the GPS units.

One thing I have learned through the GreenSkills job is to be a leader, and to step up when help is needed. Part of being a leader is coming into work everyday, being helpful to others and using teamwork. I've also learned from GreenSkills that when you have a job you should put other issues to the side and make sure everything at the work-site is job-related.

Planting a tree is like a work of art!

*Dylan Walsh is a second year at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the editor of the newsletter.*



## Big-Hearted Leaders and Youthful Gardeners

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His sister, Daisha, joined in the gesticulation and explanation. The kids were so proud when their work was finished. They came back the next two weeks, and planted a lovely purple plum along with the homeowner and his son.

On the last workday of the summer, Mr. Scott with the kids of Watson and Bassett convinced more young friends to join in the construction of a park bench. Greenspace Manager Chris Ozyck salvaged three slabs of stone to make the bench, and he and Mr. Scott helped the kids to dig shallow holes for the legs and

then mix cement. At least fourteen hands helped put the bench together. Now it stands, solid in the ground.

In the mid-nineties, when Mr. Scott began as steward of the Watson and Bassett Greenspace, he had more than fourteen hands to help. The old group picture hangs on the birdhouse. Untold numbers of young gardeners have passed through this Greenspace. They have all dug holes and piled mulch. This year was no exception. And each generation has much to show for its work. Like a Buckingham guard, Mr. Scott perennially stewards the work, always ready to help, to teach,

to recruit the youngsters who curiously eye a passing linden. Next summer some veterans will return, some new children will join, and Mr. Scott will be there for all.

*Anna is a recent graduate of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. Anna works part-time for URI and does freelance research for environmental companies. She lives in New Haven with her husband, and they are excitedly anticipating their first child in 2011.*

# From Rainstorms to College Recs

by  
**Hilary  
Faxon**

“Bummer we’ll have to cancel on my very first day of work,” I thought when I woke up one Monday morning last March. It was deluging rain, and not too many degrees above freezing. I was supposed to plant in Fair Haven with my new team of high school students from the Sound School, but imagined I would get a call to reschedule any minute, and rolled back over in my tiny dorm bed.

A few hours later I was jumping out of my truck, instantly soaked and splattered in mud. Five unhappy students and three unfazed URI staffers stood waiting for me. I had never planted bare root – I planted my first two trees balled and burlap just a few weeks before – but my partner Max and I managed to get the trees in the ground and keep the kids from hypothermia. I returned to campus after the dining halls had closed to a shocked, “what happened to you?” from my roommate. It was not the last time I would come home from URI messy and starving, but it was the first time in my three years at Yale I felt so fundamentally satisfied with my physical, educational, and community-building work.

I have spent the past spring and fall piloting the Greenskills program at the Sound School, a New Haven magnet

school focusing on marine and agriculture science and technology. The Greenskills program began in 2007 at Common Ground High School, and followed several other URI projects to reach out to youth. Last spring, FES alumna Rebecca Gratz helped bring the program to Sound, where students apply to work six to seven hours a week planting and inventorying trees in neighborhoods throughout the city. For many, this is their first job. The goals of the program are not only to work towards the city’s 10K planting goal and map urban tree cover, but also to teach our students professionalism in a work context.

Our first season at Sound had many rewards, but also had its struggles: a young team, bad weather, and a lack of communication about expectations and results. Conferences and discussion between us in the field, URI, and Sound coupled with a more rigorous selection process have resulted in an incredibly successful season this fall. Last Saturday, my team planted seven trees, up from two a day at the beginning of the program. They were justifiably proud of their accomplishments, which can be measured not only in the number of trees planted, but also in the ways each of them have grown during the internship. Petit Samantha, who once looked

to the boys to do the heavy lifting, now takes out stumps with determined pick axing. Greg, who always shows up, even post-SATs or desperately ill, wants me to write him a college recommendation. Nikki acted as our videographer last week, encouraging once-shy Juliana to narrate as she found the root flare on a Ginkgo and measured our hole’s depth. Karina, who told me she applied for the job on a whim, recently presented about URI to Sound’s PTA. Carlos says the job makes him want to use his future business degree towards environmental causes. As the season has progressed, the students have become more independent, enjoying speaking with homeowners and, in our final weeks, teaching other students to plant.

For Sound School students, Greenskills provides and opportunity to learn how to hold a job while making a real, visible, positive impact on the local community and global environment. For their supervisor, it has forced me up from bed and out of the insular Yale undergrad bubble, exposing me to fantastic kids, FES students, URI staff, and New Haven homeowners who will (we hope) water the trees we have planted for at least three years, and enjoy them for many more.

*Hilary Faxon is a senior Environmental Studies major in Yale College. Besides working for URI, she enjoys researching in the Beinecke for her thesis on depictions of landscape in the American Southwest, teaching health ed at Wilbur Cross High School, and updating her food blog. Her greatest triumph of the past semester was making it to all but one a.m. staff meeting.*



**Yale intern Hilary Faxon and Sound School team members Nikki Cerasale and Carlos Arias to the left of the tree, and Greg Ostrinski, Samantha Rios, Juliana Palmieri and Yale intern Sangay Dorji on right**



# GreenSkills Receives Prestigious Founders Fund Award

by  
Carol Ross

In 1934, The Garden Club of America (GCA) established a Founders Fund Award as a memorial to the first president of the organization, Elizabeth Price Martin. Thanks to generous gifts from clubs and individuals, the fund for this prestigious award grew, and the Amateur Gardener's Club of Baltimore received the first award in 1936 to assist in the printing of an English version of the Badianus Manuscript (1552). The manuscript is an Aztec herbal that represents the earliest known medical text and illustrations of American flora on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. Since that time, the GCA has presented the award annually to institutions throughout the country that have been identified by GCA member Clubs as worthy of special recognition. This has allowed The Garden Club of America to preserve and improve thousands of acres of land, plant innumerable trees throughout the country, restore historic landmarks, ensure the flourishing of civic plantings in countless communities and support education and research projects.

In June of 2009, the Garden Club of New Haven made an application to the Founders Fund for support of the New Haven Urban Resources Initiative. The Garden Club has long been a supporter and champion of URI, promoting and providing financial aid to the Community Greenspace Program and the street tree initiative. The Garden Club was now eager to promote the national recognition of URI's GreenSkills program. This unique job-training program couples community development with environmental restoration, providing essential services to the city of New Haven.

With the extraordinary help of Colleen Murphy-Dunning and Jody Bush, The Garden Club of New Haven completed a compelling application for a Founders Fund award: Training + Trees: Restoring New Haven's Urban Canopy; the Garden Club of Litchfield 'seconded' the application. In it, we envisioned and described both the power of trees to transform neighborhoods and the creation of an occasion for an at-risk population to seize long-term employment opportunities in tree care,



**Garden Club member Rosita Murphy observes student learning to use GPS**

landscaping, and environmental restoration. The story is a powerful one, and it attracted the attention of Garden Clubs throughout the country. Training + Trees became one of the three national finalists for the award.

At the GCA Annual Meeting in New Jersey in May, the award was announced. Training + Trees was seen as a project that provided a unique opportunity and a demonstrated need; the project had a sound financial plan, and, it was agreed, would have a sustainable, strong impact on the community. With great applause, having received votes from all of its member Clubs, The Garden Club of America awarded the GreenSkills program the runner-up award of \$7,500 and noted the particular contributions that URI has already made to New Haven. Additionally, the GCA member Clubs of Connecticut and Rhode Island, impressed by the vision and scope of the GreenSkills program, added \$3,300 of their Zone monies to this award to support its implementation and success.

The Garden Club of New Haven is thrilled to have partnered with URI in this endeavor and to have been able to secure funding for such an important environmental job-training program.

*Carol Ross has lived in New Haven for over 33 years. She has taught Latin in secondary schools in the Boston and New Haven areas and has served on numerous civic non-profit boards. Currently, she is President of the Garden Club of New Haven, an organization that works to create interest in and promote knowledge of gardening, preservation of natural resources and civic horticultural work.*

## Join the Internet Age

URI's new website has great mapping tools that allow visitors to find information about the tree in front of their house, or peruse the work of a volunteer group, or access helpful information about how to plant trees and best species to plant in New Haven. Visit [www.environment.yale.edu/uri](http://www.environment.yale.edu/uri)

### How about an electronic newsletter?

We'd love to email you a newsletter instead of printing and mailing you a hard copy. Please email [uri@yale.edu](mailto:uri@yale.edu) to be sent future issues electronically. This small action will save trees and URI \$!



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# URBAN ISSUES



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