FALL
2005
VOL.15, No.2

URBAN ISSUES

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

EMBRACING COMPLEXITY

Photo by Josh Schachter

In this issue:

Birdsong of Beaver Pond

by Nan Bartow

The fears I had remain vivid memories. Having lived virtually across the street from the pond, the increasing deterioration of the pond and its shores were visible to me daily. At the rate the pond was receding, the muck emerging with its embedded debris of shopping carts, tires, typewriters, old computers, and assorted bottles, household product containers, and yard waste, made the area aesthetically disgusting and actually a serious health hazard. It would soon become an open junkyard and swamp which, of course, would simply invite more delinquent dumpers of car batteries, tires, etc. It was a stinking, ugly mess, a serious blighted area in the middle of our otherwise pristine and gentle neighborhood. It was depressing, and soon, I believed, the value of our homes would also become depressed. Who would want to live with such a foul area in our midst?

Lowell S. Levin, June 2002
Professor Emeritus and Lecturer in Public Health and Associate Director of the Yale/WHO Collaborating Centre

After the level of the water in both Beaver Ponds had fallen to a dramatically low level during the spring of 2002, it was this clarion call from Lowell Levin, a resident of Beaver Hill, which galvanized the Friends of Beaver Pond Park (FOBPP) back into action. The groundswell began with a small

(continued on page 3)

NEW HAVEN / URBAN RESOURCES INITIATIVE, Inc.

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

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

URI Faculty Advisor,
William R. Burch, Jr.

URI Staff
Colleen Murphy-Dunning
Chris Marchand
Christopher Ozyck
Justin Pegnataro

New Haven/URI Board Members
Josephine Bush, Chair
Myles Alderman
Anna Bartow
Gordon Geballe
Christopher Getman
Meghan Knight
Robert Kreitler
Lawrence Lipsher
Sara Ohly
Patricia Pierce
Evelyn Rodriguez
David Rosen
Joseph Ryzewski
Joanne Sciulli
Leigh Shemitz
Susan Swensen
James Travers
Harry Wexler

Urban Issues
Madeleine Meek, Editor
Nicole Rousmaniere, Layout

URBAN ISSUES
Fall 2005
Vol. 16, No. 1

www.yale.edu/uri

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please email uri@yale.edu. Please include your name and address in your email.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Urban-based environmental efforts, in particular, need to embrace the diversity of our human communities, and grapple with the complexity found in our neighborhoods. Identifying priority concerns and determining the best solutions to local environmental problems require an understanding of the many diverse stakeholder perspectives. Our work with citizens in repairing the social and physical landscape in New Haven illustrates the intricacy of relationships that must be understood to be effective.

The newest member of the URI Board, Nan Bartow writes our cover story about the revival of the Friends of Beaver Ponds Park, a diverse group of community members who come together with a shared vision to protect their neighborhood park from encroachment by neighboring institutions and invasive plants like Phragmites. She beautifully describes the many citizens who have played a role in the stewardship, the park's mixed legacy, the current varied management needs, the pressing problem of invasive plants, and the diverse wildlife that depends upon the park. After retiring from teaching high school English, Nan has taken the leadership of the Friends of Beaver Ponds Park as a full-time endeavor. Her remarkable participation is also an illustration of the relationship of life stages to volunteer stewardship.

Ellen Brown shares her insights on the power of community stewardship in another community in New Haven, comparing her work as an intern in the Greenspace Program in Newhallville to her experiences in the Peace Corps in West Africa. She notes that in both locales community members demonstrated commitment and dedication to improving their environment despite various time pressures and disabilities. Ellen found that success of conservation or community development projects requires community dedication and resolve.

Our interns' personal backgrounds and ethnicities are as diverse as those found in our city's neighborhoods. This summer our intern staff came from Korea, Peru, Laos, Madagascar, upstate New York, Peoria, Milwaukee and New Haven. Their professional backgrounds were also diverse with experience in forestry, religion, or Chinese literature and sculpture, as was the case with Esther Phillips. As an aspiring landscape designer, Esther contributes her humble story of the importance of learning to listen to different perspectives in "A Beautiful Mistake at Rainbow Park." In our work an old adage comes to mind – "the right plant in the right place" – meaning ensuring the plant has the growing conditions needed to thrive. But as Esther shares in her article, if even the right plant in the right place does not meet the needs or desires of a local stakeholder or the concerns of the community – it is the wrong plant after all.

This summer our interns worked with more than fifty Greenspace groups across New Haven. Assigning an intern to a specific neighborhood with a number of Greenspace groups allows the intern to be efficient in transporting materials. More importantly, they are able to focus their attention on a particular community to better understand the neighborhood dynamics. Cesar Moran-Cahusac describes how even within one neighborhood he found smaller community subsets with differences in ethnicities and income, which affects home tenure and leisure time. Cesar found paying attention to these differences crucial in his outreach, as different communities responded differently to his outreach methods. Through trial and error he discovered how to best engage each of the communities. His work illustrates that URI continually needs to listen and understand the complexity of lifestyles, needs, and concerns for our programs to succeed.

If we are to achieve our goal of supporting broad citizen stewardship we need to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the communities we seek to engage. Each of our contributors demonstrated that need through their own unique experiences. As an organization URI must continue to strive to understand the complexity of human communities found in urban ecosystems. This understanding aids us in ensuring that our work is truly inclusive, and accomplishes our goal of recovering both the physical and social fabric of our city.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

Birdsong of Beaver Pond

(continued from page 1)

but rapidly growing band of caring citizens who organized, called meetings, contacted Yale and New Haven authorities, and expanded its telephone and e-mail communication network within the neighborhood. The FOBPP became the persistent and clear voice that refused to be stilled, as citizens wondered about the future of Beaver Pond Park and posed the same questions that Levin had.

Photo by Josh Schachter

Nan Bartow at Beaver Pond Park.

Institutional Stakeholders

Beaver Pond Park is a complex 136-acre city park not far from the center of the city. The parkland exists in concert with an interesting mix of public organizations and adjacent landowners. The open space is bordered by three educational institutions – Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), Jackie Robinson K-8 School, and Hillhouse High School – which have quite extensive facilities made up of academic buildings, field houses, athletic fields, and parking lots. Also located within the park borders are the New Haven Police Academy, which includes a firing range, and the New Haven Animal Shelter, which is also run by the Police Department.

Liability or Asset

From the 1940s through the 1980s, Beaver Pond Park came to be seen more as a liability than an asset to the community. In the 1990s in frustration, a group of Beaver Hill, Newhallville, and Dixwell area residents banded together with some Forestry and Environmental Studies students from Yale to spark community action to save the park. Thus was born FOBPP. As a resident of Beaver Hill, I was involved in the big cleanup of 1996. Like many of my neighbors, when called, I came out to help. We felt that it was time to rescue the area from the neglect and decay that had caused the local residents to consider the ponds to be dangerous and dirty places which should be avoided at all costs. It would have been unimaginable to us to think that 60 or 70 years earlier, the city of New Haven had hired lifeguards to supervise swimming for New Haven residents in the pond which was then known as "The Creek" or as "the Lagoon." On that workday in 1996, FOBPP and the Yale students received support from the help of the New Haven Parks Department, inmates who were doing supervised community projects, and many other community groups who came together to accomplish the Herculean task of clearing years of rubbish and vegetative overgrowth from in and around the ponds.

After the enormous effort, the area looked inviting, and many citizens began to use the lands for recreation. However, the burst of energy did not have endurance. Soon brush, briars, and invasive vines grew up along the edge of the South Pond. Twelve-foot-tall Phragmites at the North Pond blocked the view again. With the drastic receding of the pond waters in 2002, a revival of FOBPP was sparked. This time the citizen's group would have staying power.

Looking for underlying structural change in the organization of the group, the activist members of FOBPP reached out to an expanding number of people and organizations. We applied for a Greenspace grant through the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven and found that through URI we would be provided with flowers, bushes, and trees to plant, and an intern who would work with us each summer. In addition, we discovered that we suddenly had access to wildlife specialists, Yale professors, and consultants from the private sector such as the Broken Arrow Nursery in Hamden, CT.

Diversity

The revived FOBPP reached out to former advocates for the park, each of whom had different kinds of ties to our area. Ed Grant, one of the original founders of the Freddy Fixer Parade, brought us his passion for the park and his friends from the Dixwell Management Team and from Farnum Tenant Council. "As an environmentalist," Ed writes "I see the need for parks to remain as green open spaces in the city in order to absorb air pollution and the floods and to provide a home for wildlife. You'd be amazed at the number of people in New Haven who don't know that there are hawks and turtles and herons out there. Van Selden, who started Friends of Beaver Pond Park, worked with us to protect the

(continued on page 8)

A Beautiful Mistake at Rainbow Park

by Esther Phillips

My first apartment was in Beijing, in a two-story complex tucked away in the old part of the city in Dongcheng district within the second ring road. The woman that lived before me shi cong Riben lai de (was Japanese) and had installed a Japanese-style wooden bathtub in the bathroom, certainly a luxury as far as apartments that a student could afford in the rapidly developing but still rugged city of Beijing. When I saw the place, I was most curious about the bathtub, what was it made of? Why the particular "deep tub" design? She actually didn't know what is was made of, but said that in Japan Hinoki, or Japanese Cypress, is often used for bathtubs and other woodworking because of its light weight and resistance to cracking and warping. Coming from the Adirondack Park, I grew up around cedars and so I was interested in the bathtub. I didn't think about it much after I left China last year to finish my undergraduate studies at Yale in Chinese literature and Sculpture, at least until I was at East Haven Landscape Products this summer. Chris, URI's Greenspace Manager, then suggested that I plant a Hinoki Cypress in Rainbow Park, a pocket park on Edgewood between Howe and Dwight Streets.

In the proceeding weeks, the community group (members of Blockwatch 320) spent a great amount of time brainstorming and creating a plan for the park's restoration. The community goals were two-fold: make Rainbow Park a comfortable gathering place for blockwatch meetings and other parties and keep site lines visible to prevent crime. As an aspiring landscape designer, I took great care in plant selection for the space, which I saw as an elegant shade garden whose canopy was created by two pear trees arching over two raised island beds. Despite the strong design though, I felt that the Park needed color, or a plant that would act as a centerpiece for the space. I have a long-standing love for evergreens (my Adirondack roots), especially blue spruces and blue atlas cedars, and so recommended to Chris and the group leader that we put behind the rock in the back bed a weeping variety of a spruce or cedar, the weeping variety for its more sculptural quality. Chris disagreed with putting in a weeping variety because he thought that it would get destroyed by children hanging and playing on it, and the group leader and I discussed not wanting anything that looked too much like a Christmas tree anywhere in the park. Because it is the only spot in the Park that gets full sunlight during the day, she asked about possibly putting some butterfly-attracting perennials there. Being the typical yes-sayer that I am, I nodded and said "yes, yes, goodbye for the week," and the following Friday purchased a Hinoki Cypress to put in the back bed, because I felt it was the right design decision.

> It was a beautiful mistake for the situation, because the concern that myself and URI showed for the group leader's outlook showed a level of commitment from URI to Rainbow Park that hopefully made my relationship with the group leader stronger, the group leader's relationship with the group stronger, and the group's relationship to URI stronger.

Knowing my background in arts and design, the community group left plant selection up to me, and we learned together what kinds of plants did well in the shaded park's dry soil and tough conditions. So, disregarding our conversation about the "butterfly bed" and the safety concerns of the group, I charged forward with the "aspiring designer knows best" mentality. We planted the Cypress when the group leader was out of town only to get a message the following Tuesday that she was distressed at the tree we planted in the Park. Hearing the message, I felt I had disappointed her and realized because of a certain lack of attentiveness, a communication breakdown had occurred between the group leader and me. I was wisely advised though that it was "just a plant," and easily rectified the situation; we transplanted the tree to a new vacant lot site on Bristol Street, where it is now in the ground across from a luscious evergreen Magnolia, and marking the beginning of a Greenspace site on that street.

A beautiful mistake, though, as

Photo by Josh Schachter

Esther Phillips at Rainbow Park.

anyone in the group that helped with the planting can confirm. Even with the Hinoki Cypress' golden color and three-pronged branch structure that really tied the space together, I understood why the butterfly-attracting perennials (cardinal flowers, purple coneflowers, etc) were the right choice for the Greenspace. I learned that although Hinoki Cypress is Japan's most prized softwood and has been for centuries the preferred material in Japan for anything from temples and funeral shrines to bath environments, the community group did not prize it as much as I did because of safety concerns in the neighborhood. It was a beautiful mistake for the situation, because the concern that myself and URI showed for the group leader's outlook showed a level of commitment from URI to Rainbow Park that hopefully made my relationship with the group leader stronger, the group leader's relationship with the group stronger, and the group's relationship to URI stronger.

And about the bathtub – it never drained properly, so I couldn't even take baths, and I learned never again to choose an apartment based on a pseudo-traditional Japanese wooden tub. There was stunning Chinese scholar tree outside my window, though, that I would often sit beside and study and read and write. Another beautiful mistake, I guess.

Esther Phillips is a senior at Yale College majoring in Chinese literature, though she spends most of her time engrossed in artistic endeavors, especially in the sculpture medium.

Environmental Education Announcements

New Study Published by Lianne Fisman

Lianne Fisman, former intern and Education Coordinator from 2002-2003 at URI, recently published a study in *The Journal of Environmental Education*. Her article examines the effects of URI's Open Spaces as Learning Places program on New Haven elementary school students' awareness of their local biophysical environment. Lianne found that the program had a significant positive effect on students' awareness of New Haven's environment, and also on their knowledge of environmental concepts. Interestingly, her results suggest that these effects differ according to the characteristics of the students' neighborhoods, in particular their socioeconomic status (SES). Improvements in environmental knowledge are uncorrelated with SES, while improvements in local environmental awareness appear only among high SES students.

Goodbye to Mary Alice Lamb, Former Education Coordinator

Mary Alice Lamb, the URI Education Coordinator from 2004-2005, has returned to the south, where she is closer to her family and the mountains she grew up exploring. She is living in downtown Asheville, North Carolina where she works with a private, family foundation that supports social service non-profits in the region. She is also leading hikes and working on publications for the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. She begins a Master's program in education next spring, with a focus on place-based elementary education. In a recent email Mary Alice writes "I miss URI and especially the wonderful elementary school students and teachers that I had a chance to work with in New Haven. The Open Spaces as Learning Places Program is truly unique in the world of environmental education and it was a real blessing to get to learn from it, teach it and see the difference it made in the lives of those involved."

Photo by Justin Pegnataro

Dan Braden teaching at East Rock Park.

Welcome to Justin Pegnataro

Justin Pegnataro joined URI this fall as the new Education Coordinator. Prior to joining the URI staff, Justin was an environmental educator at the Ansonia Nature Center for the last five years. This fall he is teaching the 10-week Open Spaces as Learning Places program to four fifth-grade classes at the East Rock Global Magnet School with interns Laura Hess, Dan Braden, Madeleine Meek, and Mila Dunbar-Irwin. Justin, with intern Rosi Kerr, is also leading an environmental studies class with area high school students as part of the New Haven-Yale Saturday Seminars Program that runs every Saturday from October 15th until May 20th. The students learn about environmental issues in New Haven through the exploration of the Mill River and its watershed. This opportunity allows URI to expand to an older age cohort, allowing us to introduce more advanced concepts while still maintaining our unique New Haven-based environmental education program.

Life After URI:
Professional Paths of Former Interns

by Madeleine Meek

Along with the URI's goal of community revitalization and development comes a linked goal of clinical learning for the students who participate in both the Greenspaces and Environmental Education internships. The former interns highlighted below have taken this clinical experience into a wide range of careers from urban foresters in San Francisco such as Alexis Harte and Carla Short to further academic studies such as Lianne Fisman and Georgia Silvera. In all of their career paths, similar themes are evident to those learned and applied in the internship such as forestry, education, planning, and community development and revitalization.

Morgan Grove

Morgan Grove began working for URI in 1989 when he became Burch's first hostage to Baltimore. Grove has never stopped working for URI, however the paychecks have ceased to arrive. After finishing his PhD. in 1996, Grove went to work for the USDA Forest Service in Research, where he has integrated social and ecology dimensions for natural resource management. Both Grove and Burch were on the original and successful proposal to NSF for an urban LTER, which funded the Baltimore Ecosystem Study. Grove continues to work in Baltimore and has used his experience with URI to assist in the development of the Urban Ecology Collaborative (UEC), which includes Boston, New Haven, New York City, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. "URI continues to be a formative and enriching part of my life and I have been blessed too, to have had the pleasure of working with Bill Burch for 16 years." The outside world recognizes our accomplishments, as well. For his research and applications in Baltimore, Grove was awarded both the USDA Forest Service Chief's Early Career Scientist Award and the President's Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers in 2001. This was the first time in the history of the Forest Service that the Chief's award had been given to a social scientist.

Josh Schachter

During the summer of 1999, Josh Schachter worked as a URI intern photographing the faces and stories behind the Greenspace program. Nearly every summer since 1999, Josh continues to document URI's work. Josh says that URI "jumpstarted his photography career and instigated a passion for exploring and documenting urban issues." Josh now teaches photography and visual storytelling to youth, teachers and community members across the country. When not teaching, he runs his own photography business in Tucson, AZ. Josh's work has been published in venues ranging from *The New York Times* to the *Navajo Times* and can be seen at www.joshphotos. com.

Alexis Harte

Alexis Harte was a community forester with URI during 1993 and 1994 in both New Haven and Baltimore. After his time at URI and Yale, he went out to apply the skills he learned in the Amazon, and spent three years of community forestry work in various settings and for various local and international groups. Alexis then moved back to San Francisco and spent four years with Friends of the Urban Forest. Currently, he is coordinating the Urban Forest Council through San Francisco's Department of the Environment (www.sfenvironment.com). Alexis says that the two summers he spent in Baltimore were, "without a doubt, the most formative of his professional life. The situations he encountered there have reappeared over the course of his work. The actors are different; the plants are different; but many of the governing dynamics are the same." In his spare time, Alexis writes and records original songs--which have been heard nationally on The WB, UPN, Nickelodeon, and on several episodes of PBS's Bill Moyers Now (www.alexisharte.com).

James Jiler

James Jiler was an intern with URI in both New Haven and Baltimore during the summer and fall of 1993 and the

summer of 1994. He worked as a Community Forester. Currently, James is the director of the GreenHouse Project – a jail-to-street horticulture program on Rikers Island in New York City. He works with inmates in jail to develop job skills and, after their release hires them to work on landscape projects all over the City. His book called *Doing Time in the Garden* will be out January 2006. He says that "URI was an incredible bridge from the academic world to the professional workplace." And that it introduced him in a very hands-on way to the principles and applications of urban ecology.

Georgia Silvera

In the summer of 2001, Georgia Silvera collaborated with several Newhallville neighborhoods as a community forester for URI's Greenspace program in New Haven. Since her internship with URI, she has worked as an urban forester for the Boston Parks & Recreation Department and a community forester with the Boston Urban Stewards Program, a collaborative of University of Massachusetts Extension and the Boston Parks Department. Georgia's work with URI provided a flexible framework for developing community-oriented programs as well as linking neighborhood groups to each other. Currently, Georgia is in her second year of doctoral studies at University of California at Berkeley. Georgia's studies at Berkeley are centered on the neighborhood, the values of which she discovered in her work with the URI Greenspace program. She is specifically looking at the intersections of phenomenological and material understandings of place in neighborhood revitalization.

Lianne Fisman

Lianne Fisman was an education intern with URI in the spring of 2001, the first year that URI offered the Open Spaces as Learning Places program. She worked with URI education director, Susan Foster Swensen, to pilot this program in four New Haven public school classrooms. Watching the children's excitement as they learned about the ecology of New Haven sparked her interest in how urban youth perceive and develop attachment to their home environments. A year later, Lianne returned to work for URI, this time as the education coordinator of the Open Spaces program. This opportunity allowed her to solidify some of the teaching techniques she piloted as an intern and to act as a mentor for FES students. Lianne is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research and writing focuses on inner-city and suburban youths' relationships to their local environs. Lianne believes that the emphasis of her work is a direct result of the time spent in New Haven classrooms while working with URI.

Carla Short

Before coming to Yale and interning with URI, Carla spent more than 10 years working on biodiversity conservation in West Africa. Carla writes that "URI is a great way to connect and contribute to New Haven. I believe strongly that the more livable our cities, the more we build constituents for nature and help re-connect people to the natural world." After URI, Carla became an Urban Forester, and now she works for the City of San Francisco. As Urban Forester, she helps with planning and management of the urban forest, and planting street trees and trees in other public rights-of-way.

Erika Svendsen

Erika's internship with URI began in Baltimore in 1993 and expanded quickly into a full-time position as an urban community forester for the Revitalizing Baltimore program. On the streets of Baltimore, Erika writes that she "learned the importance of 'technology exchange,' a shared learning approach to working with communities as well as government and private partners. I also learned that community foresters must consider much more than the trees – and instead work to enhance positive social interactions, exchanges and resilient processes that hold the urban forest together. This marriage of biophysical and social benefits is the hallmark of the URI program and has had an important impact on my professional success working with organizations in the United States and abroad. It has meant that it is not enough to green the city but to do so in a way that enhances a just city." Erika is in the midst of her PhD in Urban Planning at Columbia University while she simultaneously works at the USDA Forest Service as a researcher and cares for her baby Roan (pictured here), born on September 20, 2005.

Birdsong of Beaver Pond

(continued from page 3)

ponds. He was a giant of an environmentalist. Other people blow a lot of steam, but he stayed with the job." Rob Forbes, a former Beaver Hill resident, was a font of historical advice and contacts ranging from his colleagues at Yale to consultants from DEP. Lori Hillson, who remembers the lagoon when it was filled with swimmers, brought us her connections from the immediate neighborhood where she grew up and from her position as president of the Whalley Web Management Team.

Many other dedicated community members from all of the residential neighborhoods that border the park, namely Beaver Hill, Newhallville, and a corner of Dixwell, and from various walks of life have now joined FOBPP in its mission to restore the park. Although their backgrounds and home addresses are diverse, the shared stewardship mission enables a varied group of people to connect through their dedicated work to improve the park.

United Way "Day of Caring"

Beyond the year-long work of the local residents, there are also days when the larger New Haven community comes to help out with maintenance of the park. United Way's "Day of Caring" that occurred on September 10, 2005, is just one recent example of this stewardship ethic. Among the sixty citizens who helped out at Beaver Pond Park, there were members of FOBPP, students from the Yale graduate and professional schools, and URI staff.

We divided into teams to accomplish four different tasks. One of the teams was made up of the Phragmites controllers, who, armed with loppers, shovels, and rakes, hacked away and knocked over the twelve-foot-high reeds that obscured the view of the North Pond. The second team worked in the woods on the bank under Crescent St. and continued the job that we started this summer, cutting out the trunks and roots of the invasive Norway maple saplings and then spreading mulch underneath the mature trees. Before the "Day of Caring" was over, student volunteers had helped to plant three shadblows, two oaks, and one witch hazel (all donated by the DEP). A third team took control of the ton of the fine stone dust that was delivered to us and spread it thickly around and under the bluestone benches to keep weeds from growing up. Then they worked to create a clear border between the grass and the plantings along the edge of the pond where a fourth team had weeded.

Photo by Nan Bartow

Peter Blasini, member of FOBPP, chopping down Phragmites.

Common Purpose

Both the ongoing commitment to Beaver Pond Park by FOBPP and the one-day gift of work by United Way "Day of Caring" demonstrate the importance of community-based management, as these different tasks represent the range of management needs that exist in an urban environment. Competition can be fierce for open land and for services; parks in cash- and land- strapped cities face ongoing conflicts between different stakeholders. Because it is difficult for park agencies to negotiate these competing demands alone, if urban parks are to survive the stresses of modern day, they need citizens to serve as boots on the ground and as sentinels on guard. However, citizens, left to their own resources, are often overwhelmed by the enormity of the undertaking. Just as Phragmites and briars grow back, the energy of the people wanes. Without the structural support of an organization like URI, which will stay by the side of the volunteer citizens, and the one-day boost of energy of the Days of Caring provided by the efforts of agencies such as United Way or the Regional Water Authority, restoration initiatives can lose their momentum, and parks can return to their former state of neglect and decay. In order for dedicated groups of citizens to maintain their vision, energy, and leadership, relationships forged between the people who work as volunteers and the organizations and agencies that care about open spaces and the city must continue to grow in commitment and strength. I hope that our persistent and clear voices will always refuse to be stilled as they join with the songs of the birds and take flight with the hawks and the herons while they soar over the swamps and dip into the waters of Beaver Pond Park.

Anna Bartow taught English for many years at New Haven's High School in the Community. She currently serves on the Board of URI.

Recognizing the Socioeconomic Context of Greening

by Cesar Moran-Cahusac

Photo by Josh Schachter

Taking a break at Wolcott and Lloyd after cleaning the lot.

As an urban forester this summer, planting trees and perennials was the easiest part of my job, while the challenging but most rewarding aspect of urban forestry was figuring out how to make URI's Greenspace Program meaningful to the diverse communities of New Haven. The plants became a vehicle for me to discover the constraints of different communities. I came to learn that different techniques must be used to engage different communities, as key issues change from community to community.

Fair Haven is often considered one community, but even within Fair Haven there are diverse neighborhoods and even dramatic changes from one block to the next in terms of income, ethnicity, and home tenure. Two of the neighborhoods I worked with in Fair Haven are good examples of the complexity of communities and the subsequent difference in outreach techniques I used to engage them in the Greenspace Program: the blocks surrounding Chatham Square Park in comparison to the blocks surrounding the intersection of Wolcott and Lloyd. My initial outreach triggered dissimilar responses from each of these neighborhoods towards the Program. Typically, interns' outreach begins by coordinating with a Greenspace group leader and then distributing fliers that present the Greenspace Program and the intern to the neighborhood. The Chatham Square community responded to this method and immediately participated, while this strategy of engagement was not as successful in Wolcott and Lloyd. Just posting information about the Program was not enough to get them involved and instead created confusion.

The factor that proved most critical in eliciting different reactions and necessitating alternate techniques for engaging different communities was the difference in income, which affects home tenure and leisure time. Many of the people from the Friends of Chatham Square area are homeowners and therefore they have a long-term investment in improving their street, and they also have a clear understanding of the environmental benefits that trees offer. The community surrounding Wolcott and Lloyd are mostly Hispanic migrants from Puerto Rico and Mexico who have lower income and subsequently lower levels of homeownership. As renters, they tend to be transient, which can result in community members who are less likely to invest their limited leisure time in the work of planting public street trees, the benefits of which often do not come until much later.

Members from the Wolcott and Lloyd community were more apt to participate after I walked the neighborhood with the group leader and alderwoman Migdalia Castro and we all spoke in Spanish. The tenants clearly had more confidence in me and the Program because I was walking with someone whom they were familiar with, and who could also address more pressing issues, such as crime and unemployment, in their community. The small turnout to the first coordination meeting that was detailed on the flier and mentioned while I walked through the neighborhoods with Migdalia made clear different approaches were still needed. As I continued to do outreach I learned that engaging the illegal immigrants would be particularly difficult. For example, when we asked community members to sign community rosters, they showed reluctance. I came to understand the immigrants' constant fear of being tracked down.

Some members of the Wolcott and Lloyd neighborhood did get excited about the Program when Migdalia suggested to them that they plant perennials in the curbstrips directly outside their houses which they felt would beautify the neighborhood. The perennials also take much less time to plant than trees, and thus suited the time that these community members wanted to invest. As is often the case with Greenspace groups, once the planting activity begins, a spill over effect occurs where many members begin to participate. Once the stewardship example was set at Wolcott and Lloyd, others followed by carrying out clean-up efforts in front yards, and in an abandoned lot.

By the end of the summer each community was successful in undertaking significant stewardship activities. The

(continued on page 11)

It Takes a Village ... or a Blockwatch
Working with Community at Home and Abroad

by Ellen Brown

The Urban Resources Initiative can trace its ideological roots to social forestry in the developing world. According to this model, development projects aimed at improving people's quality of life through environmental restoration are more likely to be successful if they engage local people in project planning and implementation. In addition, projects aimed at improving the environment or revitalizing the community should be based not on sure-fire formulas, but rather on frameworks that are flexible and accommodating to environmental and social diversity. After extensive work with communities in Nepal, F&ES Professor William Burch was encouraged to apply these same principles of social forestry, namely community participation and environmental restoration, to urban environments in the United States, and thus was born New Haven URI.

I also came to New Haven URI via the developing world. After graduating from college, I spent three years in the Peace Corps as an environmental protection volunteer in a rural village in northern Togo in West Africa. Because of this experience, I have attended far more community meetings, met more politicians, and done more outreach and education in Africa than I have in the United States. I applied to URI's Community Greenspace Program to gain experience working with local communities in my native country; I wanted to see if the skills and lessons learned in Africa could help me understand people and the environment in New Haven. Being part of the Greenspace Program this summer allowed me to reflect on my experiences in Africa and has re-enforced the universality of certain aspects of human behavior which are crucial to successful community development and revitalization projects.

Any positive change that occurred as a result of my presence in either Togo or New Haven was only possible because of the dedication of the community members who worked with me. In both locales, I contributed by being a facilitator and providing a forum to bring people together from different sectors to work on a common project. In Togo I was directly involved in local people's use of natural resources and their ideologies concerning environmental protection and resource conservation. I worked to build capacity by training farmers, whose fields ultimately became demonstration plots. I played a similar capacity-building role with my Greenspace groups, and as the summer progressed I watched them become landscaping consultants to their neighbors, standing next to their yards which were their own demonstration plots of a sort. The programs succeeded because of the dedication and perseverance of community members who worked to conserve their natural resources or to improve their yards and streets by taking ownership over their neighborhood and being good stewards of their local environment.

Photo by Ellen Brown

Women from the West Hazel Street blockwatch working for positive change.

Being part of the Greenspace Program this summer allowed me to reflect on my experiences in Africa and has re-enforced the universality of certain aspects of human behavior which are crucial to successful community development and revitalization projects.

One of the three goals of the Community Greenspace Program is social cohesion. Douglas Rae, a Yale Professor and the author of *City: Urbanism and Its End*, was the keynote speaker at a URI fundraiser and illustrated this concept during his talk. He showed an old photograph of violin students in New Haven posing with their instruments, and emphasized that the value is not how well the students play violin, but rather that they come together for a common purpose and interact socially. The violins are a means for bringing people together; they create music, but they also cultivate community. Likewise, the trees, shrubs, and flowers of the Community Greenspace Program are a means for restoring the environment and bringing people together. No doubt the community members I worked with learned something about plants, but they

learned more about each other. The importance lies in shared social experiences, not whether someone can remember the name of a plant or cannot tell the difference between mulch and compost.

What is striking for me in my experience with community work in the U.S. and in Africa is that despite economic, educational, social, environmental, and physical challenges I have met amazing people that commit the time and energy needed to affect change. All of the people I worked with in Togo had full time jobs, working in the fields for their subsistence, teaching at the local elementary school, running small businesses out of their homes; but they volunteered to work with me to improve their communities and help their neighbors. The same circumstances exist with our Greenspace groups as participants tend to be active and busy people with one or two jobs. For example, one of the women I worked with has two jobs, one of which she finished at 7:30am only to meet me at 9:00am to start Greenspace work. I was continually impressed and humbled by the personal demands that people have and that they would still make time to volunteer for an often physically demanding activity.

The volunteers' willingness to give to improve their community was not limited to improving their physical environment, as people showed compassion for one another and a true sense of reciprocity in these settings. I learned about people's capacity to support each other and to support neighbors and family members with physical and mental disabilities and illness. Though illness and disabilities could be viewed as a constraint that contributes to low participation and low physical capacity, these people were assets in their community. One of the Greenspace groups I worked with included members with cancer, sickle-cell anemia, and mental disabilities. One young man never dug a hole or scooped a pitch-fork of mulch but he was still very much a part of the plantings he attended.

Leadership, determination, capacity, communication, needs, and desires are equally important in forestry projects in Togo and in New Haven. Here is where Douglas Rae's point echoed for me: success of environmental projects in any locale is not only about how many trees were planted. Equally important are acts of compassion and generosity towards fellow community members.

Ellen Brown is a Master's student in the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies focusing on social ecology of conservation and development.

The Socioeconomic Context of Greening

Photo by Josh Schachter

Positioning a tree in Chatham Square.

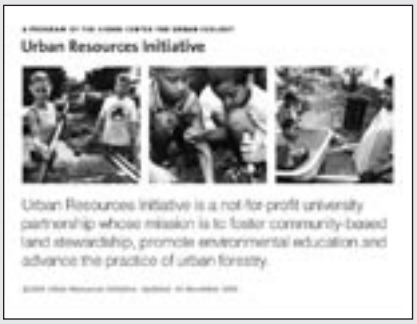
(continued from page 9)

neighborhood of Wolcott and Lloyd planted six trees and many perennials, whereas the Friends of Chatham Square planted twenty trees in total but showed no interest in planting perennials. I learned that my outreach message and planting focus had to be tailored to fit these distinct communities. My experience with the Greenspace Program is evidence that there is not one approach of urban forestry for New Haven, and even for one community within New Haven. For successful community development more generally, it is clear that we need to take the time to understand and to be responsive to the perspective and needs of diverse communities.

Cesar Moran-Cahusac is Peruvian and has a Masters in Environmental Management from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

Check out our updated website!

The article on page 6 is an example of what you can find on URI's recently launched website. Please visit it at the following address: www.yale.edu/uri.



Read the newsletter on the web!

The newsletters are now available for downloading on the website. If you prefer to stop receiving hard copies of the newsletter, please email your name and address to uri@yale.edu and we will take you off of the mailing list.

FALL
2005
VOL.15, No.2

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

URBAN ISSUES

Printed on Recycled Paper

URI
NEW HAVEN / URBAN RESOURCES INITIATIVE
205 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT
06511-2189
T: 203 432.6570
F: 203 432.0026
www.yale.edu/uri