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195 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT
06511-2189
T: 203 432.6570
F: 203 432.3817
www.yale.edu/uri

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Photo credit: Katie Beechem

Willie C. Mewborn with his cherry tree out in front of his shop.

KEEPERS OF THE STREET

by Katie Beechem

Delores McNair waters her trees early in the morning. The process relaxes her. Occasionally, she sprays the canopy, watching the droplets sparkle as they drip from the tips of her katsura trees' heart-shaped leaves.

The smell of the soil is nothing new to her. Now retired, Delores spent her career working outdoors with the Conn. Laborers' Local 455. She is proud to have been the fourth woman to work in construction in New Haven. Delores says, "I love the dirt... I love nature." She pauses. "I just love life."

For Delores, the young trees planted outside her driveway serve as powerful symbols of both love and life. The trees are a tribute to her husband,

Darryl W. McNair, who was killed by a stray bullet in 2014. The tragedy has strengthened her commitment to bringing positive change to the community. Delores is active in the nonprofit advocacy group Mothers Demand Action, which provides support and encouragement to local families affected by gun violence. She wants to plant trees as a memorial for victims.

Delores is one of 2,148 GreenSkills tree recipients in New Haven. This dedicated community of individuals represents the quiet, often unsung caretakers who diligently steward the 5,003 trees planted through the program since 2007.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR



URI volunteers, board members and staff are excited to participate again in Rock to Rock for Earth Day this year. On page 3, Anna Pickett, one of the primary organizers of the event, illustrates how URI's team will cycle under the fittingly chosen "Lorax" banner, recalling the well-known refrain of Dr. Seuss, *"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."* I hope you will respond to her call to volunteer at the Earth Day event or bike with the Lorax team or help us reach our fundraising goal!

The beloved story of the Lorax's plea to protect the Truffula trees would also aptly title the article written by GreenSkills Co-Manager Katie Beechem. Katie shares wonderful stories of five people in New Haven who have requested a tree to be planted, with the promise to be the tree's caretaker for at least three years. Providing 25 gallons of water weekly to newly planted trees is no small feat; the willingness of these caretakers to shoulder the stewardship responsibility is crucial to the long-term health of New Haven's urban forest. Katie's tribute to the five stewards is to highlight their efforts, but we thank all of the thousands of volunteers who care for our city's trees.

Fellow GreenSkills Co-Manager Matt Viens tells a different behind-the-scenes story of the origins of trees planted by URI crews. Matt reveals the little-known path of the nursery industry, from West Coast seedlings to East Coast tree farms. He also shares the meticulous care URI staff take in selecting trees from growers to matching the best tree species for each planting site in New Haven.

As Theodor Seuss Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, cautioned us nearly 50 years ago: "Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care. Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air."

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

Rock to Rock Earth Day

by Anna Pickett



***"Unless someone like you
cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get
better. It's not."***

-Dr. Seuss

This Earth Day, we invite you to join URI's Rock to Rock team for a beautiful spring bike ride from West Rock to East Rock on April 28.

This is the **Rock to Rock Earth Day Ride's** 10th year. We remember the first year when a few hundred riders rode through Beaver Pond Park while our GreenSkills high school crew planted trees there. Since then the ride has grown from 300 riders raising \$10,000 to over 1,100 riders raising over \$185,000 for local environmental work.

This is URI's fifth year as lead organizing partner. We are proud to collaborate with more than 30 organizations over monthly pots of chili to create Rock to Rock. Together we help close the widening funding gap for environmental work in New Haven, grow awareness for our cause, and build important bonds for advancing local environmental projects.

The 10th annual ride's goal is 1,500 riders raising \$250,000. We are off to a great start with early top level support from the Regional Water Authority's Watershed Fund, Faxon Law, and

MFUNd, which has allowed Rock to Rock to have a **Matching Pool** for pledges for the first time.

URI aims to raise \$20,000 through the event. **Thanks to our past riders and their donors** for supporting URI's Greenspace and GreenSkills programs through their rides and donations! We hope the Matching Pool will help us achieve our goal this year. The Matching Pool will add \$10 to every \$50 donated in honor of the 10th year. We compete with all 30 organizations for the pool until it runs out.

Back by popular demand, and following strict environmental standards, we are recycling Dr. Seuss's Lorax theme for URI's team. Register early to get your Lorax team tee-shirt, and ride alongside our float in the—new this year—five-mile family parade! If you need a bike, we'll lend you one. If you don't ride, come cheer us on along Orange Street or sign up as a volunteer. We need 100 volunteers to make this event a success!

Register to ride/volunteer or **donate** here: www.rocktorock.donordrive.com/team/trees

Keepers of the Street: A Tribute to the Stewards of New Haven's Future Canopy

by **Katie Beechem** (continued from page 1)

In order to receive a tree, recipients commit to watering it with 25 gallons each week for three years. This takes effort, as any steward can attest. But for most, the reward of new growth, healthy leaves, and vibrant flowers is more than enough to justify the effort.

Nakisha Grant-Jones loves how her cherry tree on Chamberlain Street improves the look of the neighborhood. She also appreciates how the kids who play outside watch the tree grow. "They might gain an interest in planting trees that they didn't have before." The tree also connects her to her past. As a child, Nakisha often helped her grandmother in her garden at Sherman Parkway and West Ivy Street. As she puts it, "Having a tree is making me do things I had done before."

While URI plants mostly for individual residents at their homes, about one-third of the trees have been planted by request at schools, parks, religious institutions, charitable organizations, hospitals, residential complexes, libraries, and businesses. Among these businesses are such long-term neighborhood staples as Willie C's Unisex Barber Shop on Dixwell Avenue, and Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana on Wooster Street.

Willie C. Mewborn grew up on a farm in North Carolina and later worked for a landscaper in Westport, digging trees and flowers out of the ground by hand. Not long after moving to New Haven in 1980, he started a barbershop in Newhallville and became part of the local Blockwatch. Now, Mewborn's shop is the last remaining business



Francis Rosselli cares for a young maple tree outside Frank Pepe Pizzeria.

on the block—an enduring part of the neighborhood's cultural and social fabric.

Even though he no longer works outdoors, nature is important to Mewborn. "When I moved here, there were trees all along Pond Street. [They provided] good privacy, beauty.... As time went by, trees died, and we decided to replace them." In addition to the beauty, he loves the animals that trees attract. "Birds, rabbits, squirrels,...there is always something to look forward to.... It's good for your mind."

On the opposite side of town, a new red maple stands near the entrance of Frank Pepe Pizzeria. Francis Rosselli, one of the current owners and grandchildren of Frank and Filomena Pepe, requested the tree to replace one that had died.

He wanted his customers and the community to enjoy it, a small act that is in keeping with the family's long-standing tradition of giving back to the city.

Rosselli's grandparents were quintessential Italian immigrants who founded Pepe's in 1925, making a simple and humble product from their homeland of Maiori, Italy: pizza. Some of the trees along the block have witnessed the nearly 100-year evolution of the business and the local community. The new maple may keep watch over the next century.

Rosselli reflects, "I love the city...love New Haven. It's about the trees and it's about urban renewal. I'm very proud of what we've done in New Haven."

Jane Edelstein, a resident of the East Rock neighborhood for 29 years, echoes this sentiment of giving as she considers the value of the trees her family and neighbors helped to care for on Lawrence Street starting in 2011. "Even though we may not be around to watch them grow as large as the sycamores, future generations will benefit from the clean air and the shade."

In the seven years since her trees were planted, one of Jane's sons has gone to college. The other is about to graduate from high school. She has changed jobs. "But all the while," Jane observes, "trees stay there and watch the generations come and go. The trees will become a part of the character of the street and neighborhood."

The year 2011 was a challenging one for the Edelsteins. Jane's mother's health started to decline, Hurricane Irene hit in August. Two months later, her mother passed away. "When I look back on it," Jane says, "those trees were one good thing that came out of that year."

New Haven's tree stewards are more than just tree waterers. They are the city's little-known stalwarts who invest time and effort to make positive change in the city for their loved ones, their neighbors, and future generations. More than anything, this community of stewards inspires hope and reinforces the belief that small acts—taken together—make a difference.

Photo credit: Katie Beechem

From Seed to Street: A Tree's Cross-Country Journey

by Matthew Viens

The truck clatters down the street and comes to a stop in front of its intended destination. On the back sits a Freeman's maple, a hybrid crossover between the more commonly seen red (*Acer rubrum*) and silver (*Acer saccharinum*) maples. In the next hour, the young tree will be removed from the truck and placed in the nearby curb strip, its new permanent home.

While an arduous process, this marks just the final step in what was a lengthy journey for one of New Haven's newest street trees. The story starts in Oregon roughly six years prior, when this tree was planted in a liner (a small tray of very young trees, typically grown from seed). In fact, the majority of trees sold at finished-stock nurseries around the country can trace their beginnings to the Pacific Northwest. From these West Coast origins, at only two years old, the Freeman's maple traveled for the first time—a cross-country trip from Oregon to Schichtel's Nursery in Springville, N.Y.

Next, the staff at Schichtel's—including Sales Manager Jim Kisker—took the Freeman's maple from its container and into the field to begin life outdoors. When transplanting the tree onto one of Schichtel's 15 farms, explains Jim, the staff chose a location with a combination of both available space and suitable environmental conditions. Here the tree grew, developing a more extensive root system, larger trunk, and more robust crown for over three growing seasons before reaching a size suitable for URI to plant.

URI works with the Freeman's maple because it exhibits a number of traits at the species level—including strong wood (from its red maple lineage), fast growth (from silver maple), drought tolerance, and

excellent fall color—that make it ideal for planting in an urban environment. Yet not all trees within a species are equally well-suited for life in a curb strip. So, as is done with every tree, URI staff visited Schichtel's and personally selected individual Freeman's maples. The trees that were chosen, or “tagged,” including this particular maple, exhibited a series of desirable characteristics, such as a strong and straight trunk, full crown, and disease- and damage-free bark.

Once tagged, the tree was dug from the ground and placed in both burlap wrapping and a wire cage. This system held the



Photo credit: Matthew Viens

Maple trees grow in rows at Schichtel's Nursery in Springville, N.Y.

remaining roots and soil together and helped prevent them from getting too dry. After being successfully contained, the tree and its new “root ball” were moved from the growing field into a holding yard, then onto a flatbed truck for transport. From there the tree took its second trip—a relatively short 400-mile drive from Springville, N.Y., to URI's tree-storage yard here in New Haven.

With the tree's successful delivery, however, the work was only half done. Just as it is important to find a strong, healthy tree, it is critical to identify a site in which the tree is able to survive and thrive. Each year, URI's staff visit and analyze hundreds of locations across New Haven to match site to tree, paying special attention to things like light, water, pollution, soil, and overhead obstructions (e.g., power lines). Tree requesters are also involved throughout this process to make sure species assignments align with resident preferences as closely as possible.

By following these steps the staff, functioning jointly as urban foresters and matchmakers, found a site to match key growth requirements for the Freeman's maple: a partially shaded curb strip on a low-traffic street in Westville, with ample horizontal and vertical space for the tree to expand. The requester at this address was also specifically interested in having a Freeman's maple planted, making tree and site a perfect pair!

At this point, the only task left was to complete the third and final leg of the tree's travels—from storage yard to planting site. The Freeman's maple was loaded onto one of URI's two tree trucks, botanical buses designed to carry trees to their new homes. With a rumble and a cloud of dust the truck was off to meet the planting crew, who through their hard work and expertise completed the tree's coast-to-coast journey from seed to street.



Trees wrapped and ready for planting at the URI storage yard in New Haven.

Photo credit: Matthew Viens