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URBAN ISSUES

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



Photo provided by CTMirror.Org.

Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, William Tisdale, David Pabon, Donald Williams, Robert Rawls and Don Jusino. Katie Beechem is over the governor's shoulder.

A LESSON ON CRIME, REDEMPTION AND TREES AT YALE

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by
Mark
Pazniokas

David Pabon rises early to catch a 6:30 a.m. bus from Meriden, often a 90-minute trip, to prune trees in winter and plant them in summer, wrestling 300-pound root balls into the ground, all for an hourly wage of \$12.00.

The crew boss is a petite Yalie named Katie Beechem, an Ultimate Frisbee player and CrossFit athlete who has done research in plant molecular biology. The rest of the crew are ex-cons, guys like the 27-year-old Pabon.

It's all a bit movie-of-the-weekish, mixing ex-cons, the Ivy League, and a goal of reforesting a city famously hit hard by Dutch Elm disease. But it's been working for a half dozen years now, boasting a high survival rate for the trees and a low recidivism rate for the guys.

Pabon and three co-workers explained the program Wednesday to Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, who has made criminal justice reform and second chances for offenders a priority of his second term. Malloy told them every program up for state funding has to prove its worth.

The labor is provided by Emerge, a non-profit group that arranges transitional work and counseling for offenders after their release from prison. The client is URI, the Urban Resources Initiative at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

"It changed my life, Mr. Governor," said Donald Williams, a 38-year-old California native who came

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On the afternoon of February 23rd, I received an unexpected call from the office of Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy advising me that he would like to visit the next day. Within 24 hours the URI staff and our colleagues from EMERGE were discussing our GreenSkills program during an extraordinary meeting with the governor. As reported in the Connecticut Mirror, and reprinted as our cover article in this edition of Urban Issues, the governor met us along with formerly incarcerated adults who are participating in our GreenSkills program. I was struck by his direct questions to the men: How long were your sentences? Which prisons had you been released from? Were your convictions related to drug abuse? I sensed his genuine desire to understand the difficulties these men face in returning to the community following prison, which led

to frank responses by the men working with URI and EMERGE. EMERGE Director Dan Jusino advocated his vision of what is necessary for the men to successfully re-enter into the community: highly structured and closely supervised paid training like URI's GreenSkills, together with parenting and literacy classes, "Real Talk" meetings, and more needs that are addressed by EMERGE. For me, the meeting reaffirmed that our partnership approach, with each organization contributing its essential expertise, provides the crucial support the men need to succeed.

URI offers tightly coordinated, paid job training that is prized by the community. At the end of the season we routinely meet with the adult crews to ask their feedback so we can hear their valuable insights into how we can improve the program for future teams. Without fail, each season a crew member comments that the 8–10 week tree-planting season is far too short and that they'd like to continue the work; others always quickly concur. In response to their concerns, our staff has looked for ways to broaden training, such as the pruning work described in Max Webster's article on page 5. Our new and most promising work, which includes the construction of bioswales, similarly creates at once a means of addressing an environmental matter while also increasing paid training opportunities for our GreenSkills teams.

Kelsey Semrod's article on page 4 describes our progress in grasping the impact of bioswales on improving stormwater management. Her research with Yale Professor Gaboury Benoit cites impressive results achieved by the bioswales, reducing 67% of the stormwater runoff during a 1" rainfall. Equally striking is the outcome for the men participating in GreenSkills, with only 10% returning to prison after three years compared with the average statewide recidivism rate of 54%.

People often refer to the "healing power of nature," and increasingly scientists are finding evidence supporting that theory. I believe GreenSkills is a glowing example of this notion. Offering not just a carefully supervised job-training experience, but one that is steeped with high purpose, valued by the community and connected to nature, GreenSkills has the wherewithal to help these men possibly reach their full potential.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

A Lesson on Crime, Redemption and Trees at Yale

(continued from page 1)

to Connecticut a dozen years ago. "I decided I wanted to make a change in my life. I decided I wanted to give back to a community I took so much from."

A partner is the city of New Haven. It hires URI to plant and prune trees in city parks and along streets. Neighborhood Housing Services, which also uses labor from Emerge, was contracted to repair and sometimes demolish blighted housing. The men get work, the city gets services, and Emerge gets funding.

Emerge is run by Dan Jusino, who told Malloy that the work is the "pleasant part." The men do labor for 24 hours a week, spending the rest of the time in classes on literacy, parenting and other re-entry skills, and in group sessions, including "real talk" on Mondays.

"We really blackmail these guys, because they come in like every offender, they need a job. That's all they want," Jusino said. "To go on payroll, they have to take care of other things."

The men say those "other things" ran the gamut. The issues are tackled in peer sessions that are blunt, but safe.

"You see, a lot of dudes like myself, we don't have people that got our back like that," said William Tisdale, 47, who says he used to make a living selling drugs. "I got grandkids. I gotta be there for my grandkids. I thank God for Emerge. It changed my life."

Robert Rawls, 49, the father of three girls, ages 10, 15 and 22, told Malloy, "Emerge is like a family. What you say there stays there."

The men laughed.

"They come here for jobs," Jusino said. "Governor, I try to make them citizens."

The Yale-Emerge connection came in 2010, when John DeStefano, then the mayor, realized that the number of trees URI was planting in a weekend program with city teens was not keeping up with the rate at which trees were coming down. Planting more trees would require more than young volunteers.

Yale saw an opportunity.

"Our work is focused on improving the

urban environment in a way that is meaningful for the human community," said Colleen Murphy-Dunning, director of the Urban Resources Initiative.

URI's board suggested looking into a program that could employ and teach ex-offenders, and the partnership was struck with Emerge. One hundred men have come through the program, and the men and teens have planted 4,000 trees, Murphy-Dunning said.

Malloy chatted with the men around a table in Murphy-Dunning's office on the first floor of an old mansion Yale now uses for offices. It sits on a rise overlooking Prospect Street, which is lined by mature scarlet oaks.

A catalog in her office lists 50 species URI uses. Half the city's inventory of trees are maples and oaks, and Yale takes care to promote diversity, mindful of how disease can wipe a species, as happened to the city's elms.

The governor was more curious about the men than the trees. He asked if drugs or alcohol played a role in their going to prison. The answers were terse.

"Streets."

"Alcohol."

"I was on drugs."

"Streets. Just streets."

Malloy nodded.

Participants are tested for drugs. After the Super Bowl, four men were bounced from the work crews. Jusino said they are not barred from the program, but they have to earn their way back to one of the jobs for URI or Neighborhood Housing Services.

"They have to set up a strategy with one of the program directors and stick to it," Jusino said. "We don't want to lose them."

Michael Carter, the chief administrative officer for Mayor Toni Harp, told Malloy that the city was looking at other jobs for men going through Emerge, such as graffiti clearance and snow removal.

"Are you getting any blowback from other employees?" Malloy asked.

"Absolutely not," Carter replied.

Carter said he would like to hire the men to full-time jobs. Jusino said 78 percent of the men are eventually hired for full-time jobs, often by landscapers and other contractors, and there is a two-year retention rate of 76 percent.

Malloy thanked the men for their time. They followed him into the entrance foyer and posed for pictures. They gathered around the governor to shake his hand. Malloy lowered his voice and said something about unsolicited advice, if they cared to hear it.

He gave them a quick critique on how they had interacted during their 30-minute meeting, offering praise and suggestions.

"You guys, make more eye contact," Malloy said. He looked at each man.

They nodded.

Malloy has met with inmates and ex-offenders at prisons and in community settings, including three trips to talk to inmates selected for new community reintegration centers, the last stop before their release.

The events are promotional for his second-chance policies. He calls them educational, a way to make inmates seen as people trying to rebound from mistakes. For him, in a time when fiscal challenges limit the reach of government, there also is value in seeing a public policy produce results.

"It's a bit of battery charger, I think. I want our communities to be successful, and I want these individuals to be successful," Malloy said. "We're playing a role in doing that. Government's playing a role. You know, that's what we're in government for."

This article by Mark Pazniokas first appeared in the CT Mirror, and is reprinted with permission. Based upon the discussion during the meeting, the original article misstated the tree-planting hourly wage as \$10.10. The tree-planting wage is \$12, whereas the starting wage for EMERGE staff is \$10.10.

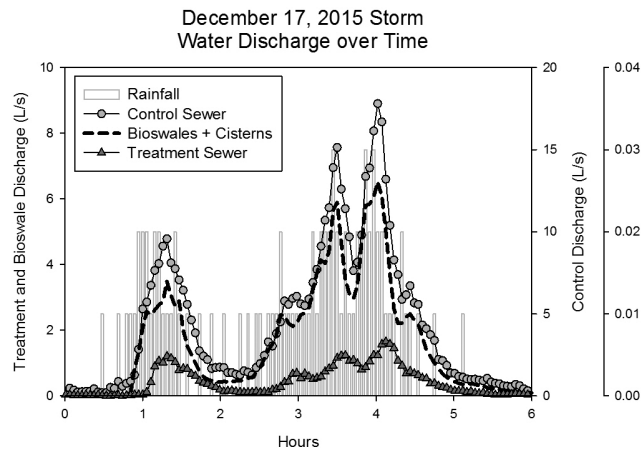
How Effective Are Bioswales at Improving Water Quality in New Haven?

by
**Kelsey
Semrod**

A year ago, a crew of GreenSkills workers finished constructing eight beautiful rain gardens on West Park Avenue, near Edgewood Park. These gardens, also called bioswales, act as stormwater drainage basins for the street, naturally removing pollutants like oil, fertilizer, and pet waste, while allowing rainfall to recharge groundwater aquifers and feed into streams gradually instead of in flood mode. These bioswales are a form of “green infrastructure,” which New Haven is beginning to explore.

In recent years, New Haven has significantly reduced its point-source pollution, like sewage or industrial waste, that issues from discrete, identifiable sources. But Long Island Sound is still plagued by so-called nonpoint-source pollution, like street runoff and combined sewer overflows (CSOs). In older sewer systems, such as West Park Avenue's, street runoff doesn't drain into a separate set of pipes, but mixes into the same sewer system that serves houses. During heavy rainstorms, water overloads the system, and the resulting mixture of untreated sewage and stormwater in Westville drains directly into the West River and other urban waterways that drain into Long Island Sound. This challenge presented an opportunity to test the efficacy of natural infrastructure in New Haven as part of my master's thesis: how effective are bioswales in restoring natural ecological processes and in improving water quality?

In November 2014, the Long Island Sound Futures Fund awarded a grant to URI and its partners, including the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, to create these gardens on West Park Avenue, and monitor the hydrology and water quality of the sewershed. Two sites were chosen: the treatment site, which already included three underground cisterns and would hold eight new bioswales, and the control site, which would remain unchanged. Hydrologic instruments were installed in both sites to measure how much water was moving through the two different systems. Tipping buckets were also emplaced directly in three of the bioswales. Water samples were then collected throughout the



Bioswales captured 67% of stormwater from West Park Avenue during this one inch December storm, significantly reducing the amount of water that traveled to the treatment sewer. This figure shows water discharge during the storm at the three locations.

course of major storms at both sites, along the street and within one of the bioswales. Water was tested for total suspended solids, nitrate, total nitrogen, orthophosphate, cadmium, copper, conductivity, and temperature, which are the important indicators of water quality.

Our results revealed that bioswales and cisterns provide a noticeable decrease in the volume of water that travels to the combined sewer system, thereby reducing those sewer overflows and improving water quality in the West River. These eight gardens removed over 50% of the stormwater runoff from West Park Avenue, and most of the remaining water was captured by the underground cisterns. The favorable water-quality effect of the bioswales, however, is difficult to quantify because of the substantial contribution of sanitary sewage during storms, but results suggest that even here there is a benefit. Cadmium and total nitrogen concentrations were consistently lower within the bioswale than along the street.

The project's success stemmed from community outreach and faithful stewardship. While siting bioswales, we met with homeowners to discuss the project and design of each garden. The West Park Avenue residents who adopted a bioswale decided which plants, flowers, and shrubs they wanted and, along with Common Ground High School student interns, helped us plant perennials last summer. A rain-barrel installation hands-on class, downspout-disconnection survey, and stormwater-management workshop were conducted to facilitate

discussions and encourage engagement. By being included in this process, homeowners and the community will gain a deeper understanding of bioswale functions and will likely take greater ownership of the sites going forward.

This research project is one of the first to evaluate the effectiveness of bioswales over time and under varying conditions, building a case for additional investments in green infrastructure in cities around the country. It is an exciting time for New Haven as the city plans to construct 200 of these bioswales over the next two years!



Photo provided by Kelsey Semrod.

Westville residents and adopters of the first West Park Avenue bioswale, Tamara and her daughter Amanda planted perennials with Common Ground student interns Jenerry, Kathiana, and Eugenio last July.

Kelsey Semrod is a Master of Environmental Science candidate at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. Her academic and work interests include urban-stormwater management and environmental education.

How to Train a Street Tree

**by
Max
Webster**

Since the GreenSkills program was founded in 2007, URI has planted approximately 4,000 trees throughout New Haven. But planting the trees is just the first step. For these trees to really thrive, they also need care and attention. That means hefty watering while young trees get established, protection against the lawn mower, and a good prune occasionally to keep them shaped up.

This past winter, URI, in partnership with the city of New Haven, won a grant from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to prune the 1,000 trees that were planted in 2010 as part of the kickoff to TreeHaven 10k. Taking full advantage of the dormant season, twelve URI interns and the GreenSkills crew from Emerge-CT have been hard at work, with pruning saws and hedge clippers.

City-grown trees often present a challenge. In the forest, trees are disciplined in their growth pattern by competition and their environment. Wide-open, grown city trees are a whole different story, and, left on their own, they can grow in unpredictable ways that could ultimately threaten their structural stability and make them susceptible to damage from harsh weather.

For example, street trees often have a lot of cross branching, with branches growing back toward the tree and across its others. This leads to crowding at the crown which, if it catches heavy snow, can overburden a tree and cause it to eventually split.

Street trees face a whole host of additional stresses that are not found in natural areas. They are brushed against by buses, swung on by kids, and backed into by cars. These insults can cause wounds that, if not taken care of, can leave trees open to attacks from pests and disease.

The five-year-old trees to be pruned this year are mature enough to have added some girth but are still not so tall that they can't be trimmed from the ground. Our goal in pruning is to make them more structurally resilient. A good pruner will start by reducing some of



Photo provided by Katie Beechem.

GreenSkills team pruning trees at West River Memorial Park.

the overcrowding in the center of the tree. Establishing a dominant leader for many tree species is also important to keep them growing upright and centered. Low branches, too, can usually be removed, as they suffer the most from car-door openings and pedestrian traffic.

There are several lessons to remember while pruning. Don't take off more than a third of the crown if you don't have to, for this would make it hard for the tree to photosynthesize and heal itself in the growing season. Don't make any cuts that are larger than half the size of the trunk. Those are a little too hard to heal as well. And make only a few big cuts rather than a bunch of little cuts. Finally, it's down to the pruner's eye and deciding what will look just right. Over the years, when you pass by that tree you'll remember that it's a special one that is prized and has been cared for.

Pruning is just one part of the stewardship strategy for our street trees, but it's an important one. So far, a total of 535 trees have been pruned this year, putting us right in line to accomplish our goal by the end of the spring. And next year, there will be another batch of five-year-old trees that need our attention, and the year after, another batch. If we're going to get to 10,000 trees in New Haven, we'd better remember that planting a tree is only the first step in establishing a robust urban canopy.

Max Webster is a Master of Environmental Management candidate at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. His academic interests are in community conservation and sustainable land management practice.

Announcements & Events



A TREE FOR EVERY CHILD

URI GreenSkills crews have planted 33 trees at 22 homes through our new partnership with Yale-New Haven Hospital inspired by the Harvard Business School Community Partners at the beginning of 2015. Through this partnership, every newborn with a New Haven residence is sent home with a tree-request postcard for their parents to mail in, call in, or enter online to request trees in their honor. There have been a total of 48 requests made (with 10 on our docket for spring

plantings) as a result of our partnership, and that number continues to grow!

This opportunity is not only for infants born at YNHH or St. Raphael. If you have a child or children you would like to honor with a tree in your New Haven curb strip or front yard, give us a call: 203-432-6189. Similarly, any New Haven resident can request "Tribute Trees" in honor of a loved one. Call us today to request yours!

ARBORPHILES: PEOPLE WHO LOVE TREES!



APRIL 30, 2016 --- Join URI's Rock to Rock team, the Arborphiles, for a bike ride from West Rock to East Rock along one of five beautiful routes: 8-mile, 12-mile, 20-mile, 40-mile, or a metric century. In 2015 our team of 143 cyclists raised \$10,760 for URI. We hope you will help us meet our goal of raising \$10,000 for Community Greenspace and GreenSkills again this spring.

Thanks to our 24 early registrants (as of March 29) listed below. To join us, visit www.rocktorock.donordrive.com/team/arborphiles.

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Philip Picotte
Kelsey Semrod
Sandy Shaner
Katie and Steve Weber

We hope to see you on April 30 for a fun day exploring New Haven by bike, listening to great live music along the way, and celebrating Earth Day with 28 terrific environmental organization partners!

COMMUNITY GREENSPACE UPCOMING EVENTS

<https://www.facebook.com/URI.NewHaven/events>

Mark your calendars for an exciting season of Greenspace workshops, tours, and events. Please RSVP to uri@yale.edu for any of the following events:

- On Sunday, **May 15**, the Community Greenspace volunteers are invited on a field trip to tour Connecticut College's landscapes at 12:30 p.m.
- The New Greenspace Group Orientation will be held at our offices on **May 19** at 6 p.m.
- The Parks Dept. will host our Friends of Parks groups for an event on **May 24** at 5:30 p.m. at Coogan Pavilion in Edgewood Park.
- Our annual perennial swap will be on **May 25** at the Pardee Rose Garden at 6 p.m. Stay tuned by checking our Facebook Events page for details on our **June 9** Tree-Planting Workshop, **June 21** Tree-Pruning Workshop, a Tree-Identification Workshop, and our End of the Season Celebration at Lighthouse Point in September.
- Our Annual Greenspace Bus Tour will be on Friday, **July 29**. We will meet at City Hall at 5 p.m. for the tour.

thank you

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Photo provided by Anna Ruth Pickett.

Governor Malloy with the URI GreenSkills team.

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