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# URBAN ISSUES

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



## PLANTING TREES IN GROWING NUMBERS

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by  
**Bidisha  
Banerjee**

Over the next five years, the city of New Haven will partner with URI to plant 10,000 trees, proclaimed Mayor John DeStefano on a balmy evening in early October. Amidst loud applause at the ocean-side Sage Restaurant, DeStefano pledged a dramatic six-fold increase in the city's annual commitment to tree-planting. Mayor John DeStefano lauded URI for "strengthening the fabric of our communities" and credited URI Director Colleen Murphy-Dunning for convincing him over the summer that the ambitious goal is both necessary and possible. "Colleen pointed out we were losing more trees than we were gaining, and the way we build our sidewalks hurts our trees. We're planting three to four hundred trees a year, but losing about five hundred a year," he said.

The Mayor's support for ramping up New Haven's tree planting program – a move that drew praise from the

Connecticut state forester, New Haven Parks and Recreation Director, neighborhood activists, and Yale students alike – seems like a no-brainer at first glance. But a closer look at the events leading up to the Mayor's proclamation yields a fascinating glimpse of how academic research, community organizing, support from municipal and state-level authorities, enthusiasm on the part of local youth and their teachers, and persistence and leadership on URI's part successfully intersected to create a bold new program for New Haven.

### Digging Up Data

This story's roots reach back to 2007, when Suzy Oversvee, a Masters' student at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (FES), un-earthed data from a New Haven street tree inventory done by ACRT. Unfortunately soon after completing (*continued on page 4*)



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# FROM THE DIRECTOR



Our city, the Elm City, is historically connected to trees. Viewing the towering trunks along Hillhouse Avenue, Charles Dickens once declared it the most beautiful street in America. The nation's first School of Forestry was founded here. And now URI, in upholding this legacy, has embarked upon an ambitious campaign in partnership with the City and the Office of the Mayor: through a mixture of public and private ventures, URI hopes to help plant 10,000 trees over the next five years.

Bidisha Banerjee unpacks this major initiative with her in-depth cover story, "Tree Explosion!" She traces the growth of the plan from concept to actuality by weaving together the active cooperation of academics, students, non-profit workers, and city officials. Under this initiative, URI is charged to plant 1,000 trees per year while urging those in the private sector to match the progress on their own land.

Having assumed a leadership role in the establishment of this project, URI will continue leading throughout implementation. Greenspace volunteers and the local teenagers who work with URI – many of whom are profiled in this issue – will play a central role in reaching the goal of 10,000 plantings. It promises to be a challenging but rewarding undertaking. As one of our teen interns put it: "I go home each night and, even if it's hard, I say to myself: I like my job."

Eliza Cava describes the power of linking all of URI's tree data with computer technology. In collaboration with F&ES graduate Casey Brown and Stacey Maples of the Map Collection at Yale University Library, URI is creating a GIS-driven street tree Google map that details the location and species of every tree in New Haven. This valuable tool will serve urban planning officials in assessing the resilience of our urban forest and those areas that could benefit from more planting. It will just as readily serve the curious citizen who wants to know what species grows outside her house, or who would like to request another tree through URI.

The undertaking of the 10,000 trees campaign marks a significant transition away from URI's involvement with the Open Spaces as Learning Places curriculum. Lisa Leombruni describes this handing of the torch: once the primary instructor, URI recently integrated the experiential teaching method into the New Haven sixth grade science curriculum. Now every sixth grader in the city will experience canoeing on the Mill River, the netting of baby frogs, and the deep relevance of local water quality to our daily lives.

And finally, the work this summer, as always, got right at the core of URI's mission. Green-space interns partnered with communities around the City of New Haven to undertake a variety of neighborhood greening projects. Not just about trees, these projects often plant seeds of powerful social uplift. William Lynam, Bjorn Fredrickson and Kyle Williams, through three beautiful stories, elucidate how a tree is not just a tree, but a symbol of things far greater – civic leadership, bonding, respect, and cooperation. Our youth workers tell us the same story in the profiles of this issue.

Trees, more than simply decorative, can prove definitive to the character of a city. Trees provide opportunity for recreation and education. They offer benefits both social and environmental. They shade us from the sun and keep rain from our brows. If Hillhouse Avenue was, indeed, once so highly lauded, URI hopes to convert many more of New Haven's streets into America's most beautiful.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

# Filling the Void

**by**  
**Kyle**  
**Williams** By the end of July, when summer had finally won over this spring's rainy coolness, I felt as though I had the Community Forestry gig figured out. I had learned to get to the shed early for the good shovels and my groups were checking off their summer planting goals by the week. But one extraordinary night both surprised me and reaffirmed my faith in the mission and relevance of the Community Greenspace program.

My first stop on the evening of July 28th was at Wolcott and Lloyd in Fair Haven. This site has been part of URI's Greenspace program for over ten years. In that time, it has transformed from a vacant lot used as a dumping ground and gang hangout to a peaceful, colorful park. Where drug deals once went down, Purple Coneflower and Butterfly Bush now reach out to passersby. A wooden arbor invites neighbors to sit below its Wisteria and Trumpet Vine crown. Whiskey barrel planters full of flowers line Wolcott and Lloyd Streets, softening their hard edges.

Which is not to say that all is rosy. Indeed, evidence to the contrary can be found right across Lloyd Street: an abandoned home grows more decrepit by the day, windows boarded up and graffiti marring its walls. Wailing sirens twice interrupted our workdays as the Police swooped in to break up disputes less than a block away. But Gwen Heath, a Greenspace leader and one of the anchors of the Wolcott/Lloyd community, shrugs it off: "I don't have time for their mess. I just keep on doing my thing here." Members often remarked that working on the Greenspace was therapy, an escape from the daily worries of work and health and money.

On this particular night, we were replanting the corner of Wolcott and Lloyd with a beautiful Purpleleaf Plum. When I arrived at the site, however, things did not look good: While we had averaged 5-7 volunteers in previous weeks, Gwen was the only person there. But we had the tree and the tools, so

after waiting for a few minutes Gwen decided we would just go for it.

The dirt was loosely packed and we made steady progress. After half an hour, the hole was perhaps half as deep and not nearly as wide as it needed to be. We continued our digging.

Just then, Simeon, a neighbor who lived just south of the site, walked by. Simeon regularly passed the site and always promised to help out, but he had yet to attend a workday. That evening, Gwen and I barely had time to say, "Hello," before he grabbed a shovel and pitched in. In short order we had a beautiful hole.

The Purpleleaf Plum had a large root ball and I was wondering how three of us could maneuver it into the hole. As we strained to lower the tree from the truck, two young men across the street called out to us, offering help. We accepted gladly, and so Stevie Stevie and Frenchy, who were not dressed for planting and likely had somewhere to be, threw their shoulders to the root

ball. With no small amount of heaving and grunting, we soon had a radiant, new tree standing at the corner of Wolcott and Lloyd. All three men stuck around to help fill the hole and mulch around the base of the tree. Then, with quick thanks from Gwen and me and a wave goodbye, they were on their way.

What began as a difficult evening turned into a wonderful opportunity to connect with new community members. It was a reminder of the unifying power of even a single tree.

As we put away the tools and I prepared to move on to my second group, a woman from across Wolcott Street complimented Gwen on how nice the space looked. Gwen smiled and began recruiting her to come help plant the following week.

*Kyle Williams is a second year at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies with an interest in architecture. He worked as a Greenspace intern at URI last summer.*



**Fair Haven's Wolcott & Lloyd in full bloom.**

*Photo: Josh Schachter*

# Tree Explosion!

*(continued from page 1)*

the inventory, the company no longer supported the software that had been used to gather the data, leaving the inventory defunct. No one was able to work with the data until Oversvee converted it into usable form and plugged it into a program called STRATUM, which put a dollar amount on the eco-system services (like storm-water retention and carbon sequestration) that each tree species provides.

Last year, the City of New Haven and URI received part of a multi-state collaborative grant from the Forest Service, which also includes Washington, DC, Hartford and cities in both Massachu-

setts and Rhode Island. Using satellite imagery, researchers at the UVM Spatial Analysis Lab analyzed the tree canopy cover across all land use in the city. "They provided really fine grain (1 meter) resolution data on tree cover in New Haven," Murphy-Dunning said. "The study clearly shows the under-served areas in New Haven." The Hill neighborhood at 23% cover, for example, stands stark and barren in comparison to Westville, which boasts 55% canopy cover.

Now, city agency department heads armed with both Oversvee's calculations and the satellite imagery analysis are

working with URI to enhance policies to protect existing trees and proactively plant trees in neighborhoods with low tree cover. Fortunately, Bob Levine, Director of Parks, Recreation & Trees, trusts and strongly supports URI, which is responsible for planting 300 - 400 trees annually throughout the city, while Parks and Recreation is responsible for pruning, removal, and replacement of hazardous, dead, or dying trees. "When I first came to the department twelve years ago, contractors planted the trees. Now, for the same price, URI plants two to three times more trees by getting the community and interns involved. And



**Castle Street Community digs in.**

*Photo: Josh Schachter*

# Tree Explosion!

the best part is the connection with the community,” Levine said.

URI trains community members to water the trees for the first few years after planting and to soak the root-ball for young trees, and to do minor pruning. “Due to stewardship, the trees that URI plants have a much higher survival rate than contractor’s trees,” Levine said. No one has done the math, but Levine estimates that the URI trees have a 75-95% survival rate annually. Further, Levine points out, “Colleen was very helpful in keeping the tree inventory going even after ACRT went bankrupt. We’ve been working on this for years, but Colleen really pushed it forward.”

Another ally, Chris Donnelly, FES alum and State Urban Forester for the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, was equally enthusiastic. Because he believes that 21<sup>st</sup> Century cities have to be much more tree-focused than cities of the past, he partnered with URI to apply for the Forest Service grant. “There’s been a lot of hard work put into this effort, which is almost ten years in the making,” Donnelly said. “It’s a real step forward for New Haven to provide leadership for the rest of the state. New Haven joins in with much larger cities like Boston, New York, and San Francisco in making a substantial tree-planting commitment.”

How will the 10,000 trees goal be achieved? URI is partnering with the City and local teens to plant 1,000 trees annually on public land. In addition, the Mayor and URI hope to encourage the private sector to match that by planting 1,000 trees on private land. Accordingly, URI will work with the City to reach out to businesses, universities, the Housing Authority, private homeowners, and the faith community to encourage them to make commitments to tree planting.

“We hope the public generally will be inspired to plant on their own property,” Murphy-Dunning says.

## Beyond the Numbers

While the massively increased support for the number of trees planted is impressive, for Murphy-Dunning, the program’s impact on local youth is para-

Terrance Walker, a junior at Common Ground High School, and a resident of the Dixwell neighborhood, has interned with URI for a year. He says that the job “makes me feel like I’m at school but on a bigger scale.” He’d always wondered how a tree got planted; when he tried it himself, he found that he liked planting a lot. “I like digging out a doughnut,” Terrance said, referring to the shape of the hole in which a tree is planted.

“And I like seeing the tree fill up empty space.” His favorite trees are Gingko, Cherry, and Japanese Maple.

Terrance’s expertise was so solid that, this summer, Murphy-Dunning asked him to teach the incoming class of FES students how to plant and to use GPS to help

describe and identify individual street trees. He was initially nervous about teaching graduate students, but his grandmother encouraged him to do it. The students were generally receptive, Terrance found.

This year, though Terrance hasn’t been able to plant in his own neighborhood, Dixwell, he has planted a lot in Westville. As soon as the University of Vermont study revealed the stark disparity in tree cover between different New Haven neighborhoods, Murphy-Dunning said, “The big question became: where are we going to plant these trees?” Her voice brimming with eagerness, she concluded, “I’d love to hire an army of kids to do this.”

*Bidisha Banerjee is a second-year Masters’ candidate at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. She learned to catch newts last year while interning with the Open Spaces as Learning Places program; she has also served as the URI newsletter editor. She is at work on a book about walking the Ganges River.*

**“New Haven joins in with much larger cities like Boston, New York, and San Francisco in making a substantial tree-planting commitment.”**

mount. For the past eight years, URI ran a tremendously successful Open Spaces as Learning Places program in New Haven middle schools. Its top-notch environmental education curriculum was partially adopted by New Haven Public Schools this year. Murphy-Dunning sees the expanded tree-planting initiative as an opportunity to keep engaging New Haven youth with their local environment.

Joel Tolman, the Director of Development at Common Ground High School, vouches for the impact that URI’s Green Skills program can have on teenagers. “The exciting thing that happened this year is that thirty Common Ground students will have a chance to get paid work experience and build leadership,” he explained. In rotations of ten over the fall, spring, and summer, this group of students (most of whom are juniors and seniors) will have a chance to intern with URI. The leadership and teamwork skills that students learn on the job with URI are “remarkably transferable,” Tolman said, noting that some of his students who have worked with URI in the past built on that experience to write a business plan for a tree-planting company.

# Growth: Places and People

by  
**Dylan  
Walsh**

Each autumn and spring, students from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies partner with crews of New Haven youth to plant trees and develop and maintain green-spaces. The physical work is immediate and rewarding. However, URI designed the program around goals loftier than beautification. As much as the program is about healthy growth in plants, it is about healthy growth in people.

This Halloween we gathered both fall crews for an informal lunch and a chance to reflect. There were pizza and salad and great waves of laughter. At the beginning of one group exercise, a crewmate turned to her partners and said, "So. How are we going to start?" A telling question. Below you'll find the depth of meaning in planting trees.



## **Cheryl Bednard**

*On the first day of this job* I was so excited to work and dig holes. I had so much fun last year that I just really wanted to work with URI again. I love it.

*I contribute* hard work, digging skills, and a positive attitude to the team.

*What are the most important things you've learned from work at URI?*

How to work as a team, for sure. Also working hard and respecting each other and staying focused. Overall, I just love working with my teammates.

*What do you hope for these final three weeks?*

I would like a chance to work with the other team. All the people are great.



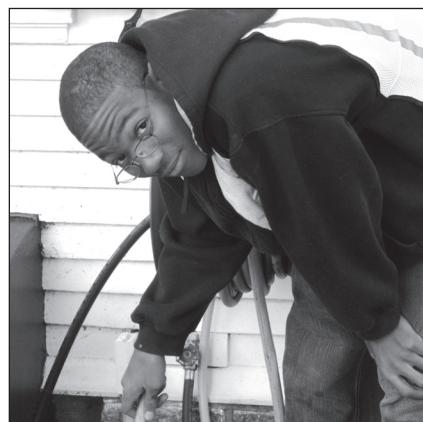
## **Almasi Bridges**

*Some things I have learned, or gotten better at, are planting a tree correctly and in different conditions like rain and snow. It snowed one day we were out there, but we stuck it out, even though it was freezing and the ground was hard.*

*I contribute* a sense of humor, fun, and help to those who need help when they need it.

*What are the most important things you've learned from work at URI?*

I'm better at communicating with other people and working as a team. I've also gotten better at following directions and taking the role of leader.



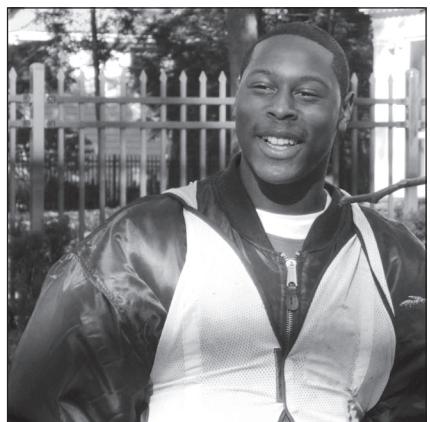
## **Terrance Walker**

*On the first day of this job* I was anxious. *At this point in the year*, I feel happy.

*A few things I contribute to my work team* are a good sense of leadership and a positive attitude. When people are upset with something, or with each other, I can usually get them to laugh.

*What are the most important things you've learned from work at URI?*

Two things: when everyone works together we can work more quickly and do a better job. And if a person cannot do something, it's best to lend a hand. You need to pay attention to your surroundings and look out for others.



## **Rheji Freeman**

*On the first day of this job*, I was excited. *At this point in the year*, I feel excited, still.

*Something I contribute to my work team* is strength.

*What are the most important things you've learned from work at URI?*

There's a lot. I learned about leadership, teamwork, keeping up communication, staying focused, and that everybody has an important place in the group.

*What do you hope for these final three weeks?*

To chill out, relax, and enjoy being with the team. I want to laugh the whole time.

## **Keith Taylor**

*On the first day of this job*, I was unhappy. *At this point in the year*, I feel inspired.

*Some things I've learned are* how to prune and shear trees, and that complaining slows everyone down while working as a team helps everyone. I've also learned how to encourage individuals and the team and, definitely, how to improvise.



### Keith Taylor

*What are the most important skills you've gained from work at URI?*

Having the confidence to achieve the task I'm assigned to. I've had doubts about getting the job done on time and about being able to do it, so I sometimes don't move fast. But I've learned my actions affect my teammates, and that they depend on me to get the task or goal done. I have to do my part, to work hard to back up my team and to be a good leader.



### Terrell Blango

*On the first day of the job, I was late.*

*At this point in the year, I feel accomplished about what we've done.*

*Some things I've learned are how to read a map and why this skill might be important.*

*What are the things I've learned from URI?*

1. Never give up and stay focused.
2. Always have a positive attitude, at all times.

3. Be a leader.
4. Always help your team when it needs help.
5. Try your best no matter what.



### Shakia Cox

*Some things I've learned or gotten better at are how to give good advice and how to work hard and to work well with other people.*

*I'm recognized as good at talking to the neighbors and customers about what we're doing.*

*The most important things I have learned are how planting trees helps the world, that you need to be motivated, and that as a team we grew a lot because we were all leaders for each other. Power. Love. Unstoppable.*

### Joseph Stoudmire, Jr.

*On the first day of the job, I was eager to learn.*

*At this point in the year, I'm motivated.*

*Some skills I've gained from URI are how to be a leader, and what it means to be a leader.*

*The most important things I have learned through working with URI are how to work well with others and that I definitely can have a positive impact in my community as well as the environment.*

### Tamica Cray

*At this point in the year, I realize that planting a tree actually has steps to it, and that it is not just placing a tree in a hole you've dug. You have to give space for the root ball, put in compost, and digging isn't*



### Tamica Cray, Joe Stoudmire and Doris Teel (from left-right)

that easy with bedrock. But it is all worth it after seeing the results. I've never noticed a new happy tree until now.

*What are the most important things you've learning from working at URI?*

The most important things I've learned from working at URI are 1) always observe the situations you are in before you act, and 2) always act positively because it can make a difference.

*How have you grown?*

I have grown by being able to tolerate working as a team/group more efficiently and reasoning between everyone's ideas to make a single decision.

### Doris Teel

*The most important things I've learned from planting trees with my team are that we are going to have some times when we don't get along and everything seems to go wrong. But the most important thing is for us to keep our heads up. Also, I feel it is important that even though it takes us a little longer to plant our trees, we still finish together. I feel that by coming together, this job has not only brought us closer together as a team at work, it has brought us closer together at school. My team always makes me laugh so I go home each night and, even if it's hard, I say to myself: I like my job. I am honored to work with my crewmates and I feel that we are successful and that this is an experience I will never forget.*

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

# The Test of Time

by  
**William  
Lynam**

The Greenspace group on Castle Street never even had time to choose a name. Due to an unusually late grant opportunity, Chris Ozyck, URI's Greenspace Manager, was able to get them started in mid-July. "This way they'll hit the ground running next summer," he explained. With three weeks left in the program, other groups were winding down. I was excited to connect a new community to Urban Resources Initiative so late in the season, but I, admittedly, did not have very high expectations. And then I met Claudia Herrera.

Claudia is a born leader. She bubbled with enthusiasm at our introduction. She had already effectively reached out to neighbors and held ambitious vision. She could plainly point to the better-tended gardens, but wanted to know why they were better tended. After talking to owners, it turned out

that it wasn't a question so much of time or energy as it was one of gang activity: some residents knew their property as turf, and they didn't want to inadvertently express claim to the area. Claudia quickly realized the connection between this problem and planting trees.

The neighborhood has received help from City Hall, the Livable City Initiative and the New Haven police, but Claudia wants to do more than just "keep it quiet for a while." "I was looking for a long term commitment with my community," she explained. After a bit of internet research, she discovered the URI Community Greenspace Program. After a bit of research on the Community Greenspace Program, she decided to apply.

We had three workdays together, and in these three days communication increased among neighbors. This had

a wonderful impact on the neighborhood. "We need to pay more attention to who's living next door," Claudia reflected. Neighbors who had gone for years without interaction finally introduced themselves. Many came to understand and agree upon common community goals.

Of course, not everyone was always on the same page. In one instance, after the community group had dug a hole on one resident's curb strip, the resident had a change of heart. He decided the trees that were going in weren't the trees for him. The group had to pull out and fill the hole they had just dug.

But these were minor setbacks. The young and developing group, still in the process of forming its identity, planted five trees and fifty perennials on neighborhood curb strips. Not only did these plants improve the ecology of the neighborhood, they also gave neighbors pride in their surroundings. This pride has spurred a noticeable decrease in littering and a growth of people caring for their property, enjoying and contributing to the newfound beauty. With more people out, there has been an increased sense of security. Claudia, through planting, has started solving the problem she wants solved.

Community issues are rarely resolved with a "quick fix." In fact, the Urban Resources Initiative prides itself on continued relationships with Community Greenspace groups conceived fifteen years ago. Within a few weeks this summer, however, the group on Castle Street was able to create lasting aesthetic, ecological, and social legacies for the community. By the end of my work with Claudia and her recruits, I was, in fact, impressed with what could be accomplished in three meetings. It is exciting to think what might be achieved with the whole of next summer, or over the course of a few years. The potential, I now realize, is great.

*William Lynam graduates this year from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. He worked as a Greenspace intern the summer of 2009.*



**Claudia Herrera's (left) enthusiasm shines.**

*Photo: Josh Schachter*

# Planting a New Curriculum

by  
**Lisa  
Leombruni**

After eight years of teaching environmental science to New Haven fifth and sixth graders, URI is stepping down from its role as primary instructor of the “Open Spaces as Learning Places” curriculum. URI will continue to provide support, but hopes to reach more students by establishing the curriculum as an integral part of every sixth grade class: as of June 30, 2009, the “Watersheds as Learning Places” (WLP) program, a curriculum specifically designed to take advantage of New Haven’s natural resources and meet Connecticut State Science standards, became a requisite of every New Haven sixth grader’s education.

To ensure comfort and confidence with this new curriculum, URI staff has been working closely with Richard Therrien, the City’s Science Curriculum Supervisor, to identify and address teachers’ concerns. A daylong workshop in October of 2008 introduced the curriculum and offered basic guidance on field trip options and logistics. Requests for further training led to a weeklong Watersheds as Learning Places Workshop sponsored by NOAA (National Oceanic & Atmospheric Agency) and hosted by the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in early August.

## The Workshop

The week began with classroom familiarization with the curriculum kit. Discussion revolved around local environmental issues like water pollution, soil erosion, and pond invertebrate health. As one teacher summarized, “Having all the materials in front of us and going through all the lessons was incredibly helpful. The materials are simple and adaptable.”

But, like the WLP curriculum itself, indoor training sessions were only one part of the learning; just as much was taught outdoors. The first field trip brought participants to the Mill River, where they learned to navigate the smooth waters by canoe. Many were apprehensive about their first steps into a wobbly, narrow boat. But after the instruction and coaching of Mar-

tin Torres Quintero, a New Haven Parks Department employee, the teachers embarked and had an amazing time on the river. They realized that despite the tricky logistics of getting a sixth grade classroom of twenty-five to the river and separated into boats, the enrichment and excitement of exploring the natural environment proves well worth it.

Subsequent field trips included lessons on pond invertebrate health at Lake Wintergreen and excursions into the New Haven watershed to better understand the connections between urban forms, landscape, and water quality. Dr. Gaboury Benoit of Yale Forestry instructed a segment on water chemistry, a topic that made teachers particularly anxious. By the end of the day, however, after talk of suspended particulates, dissolved oxygen, pH, and coliform bacteria, the material was less daunting and more relevant. As one teacher put it, “[Today’s] class was informative and provided excellent background knowledge ... [The] instructor helped make the information teacher-friendly.”

## Learn by Doing

By week’s end, the training had come to represent the curriculum as a whole:



**Launching canoes and new skills.**

teachers once slightly apprehensive were now enthusiastically engaged with the material. “Open Spaces as Learning Places” strives for the same transformation among students: for those disinterested in, or even apprehensive of, the environment, WLP serves to engage and inspire.

URI aims to build capacity for science learning through local, experiential instruction. While URI’s direct involvement with “Open Spaces as Learning Places” was a wonderful opportunity, Yale interns and URI staff were only able to bring their support into one classroom at a time. By directing the program into the hands of teachers and nourishing a new form of teaching, URI hopes to achieve systemic change in the way New Haven sixth graders learn about their environment. The citywide adoption of URI’s Watersheds as Learning Places curriculum will have far greater impact as more children learn about the environment through unique exploration of the one around them.

*Lisa Leombruni, F&ES 2009, has worked for URI as both an environmental education intern and a Greenspace intern.*

# Greening Westville

by  
**Bjorn  
Fredrickson**

As a new URI intern I was warned that Jessica Feinleib has an ambitious vision for planting trees. In 2007 she applied for a Community Greenspace grant, which supported her in planting a small handful of trees in the Westville neighborhood. With a little help from her neighbors, Jessica – working as an anesthesiologist at the West Haven VA hospital, and as a devoted mother of a two-year-old – summoned the time and energy to plant eight trees in July of 2007. She was eight months pregnant at the time. Jessica followed with an additional four trees in 2008. This year, somehow, she planned to plant upwards of 25 trees.

In 2003 Jessica and her husband Mike moved into their Westville home. As Jessica recounts, the yard contained “an extensive collection of plastic flowers.” Fast forward to 2007: Jessica had replaced her phony flower patch with a beautiful shade garden, but was not finished with her effort to green her surroundings. As she and her daughter Ingrid, then still a toddler, walked home from the farmers’ market one scorching June day, Jessica noticed that Willard Street was nearly

barren of shade-giving trees. With support from URI’s Greenspace program, Jessica began the realization of her vision: a Westville lined with trees.

Over the coming two years Jessica formed a planting team of other Westville residents. I met with Jessica and her neighbor Lynn Price one afternoon early last June to distribute fliers advertising the group’s first of four summer plantings. As we walked the neighborhood I managed to convince Jessica that the group should start out the day by planting just two trees, rather than the eight she requested. Planting a single tree with a small group can be grueling work, I cautioned; although the group had experience with planting, twelve trees planted over the course of two years was a different story than eight in one day.

A week later something special happened in Westville: neighbors poured into the street and the two trees were in the ground within an hour. The group continued to grow through the summer, and successfully planted eight trees during each of its next three planting sessions. Jessica had led the

Westville tree team to plant a total of 26 trees, over six times the number planted the year before.

Whether this group blossomed because of the changes the newly planted trees brought to the streetscape, Jessica’s tireless efforts to promote the Community Greenspace Program to her neighbors, or some lucky coincidence of factors is ultimately up in the air. What is certain, however, is that the tree planting in Westville over the past three summers fostered a lasting sense of community and a belief in the power of local leadership. Jessica estimates that 60 neighbors have come to know one another through the program. Lynn Price has stepped up to assist in organizing plantings in 2010, when the group hopes to plant 32 trees, 20 of which have already been adopted. The group also plans to expand its community connections by partnering with the Blockwatch 303 Greenspace group, which works in the commercial areas of Westville, as well as around Edgewood Park and Mitchell Library.

Beyond building community, groups like the Westville tree team play an integral role in New Haven’s pledge to plant 10,000 trees over the coming five years. This feat will not be possible without the passion for trees and a greener city that people like Jessica share with their neighbors and families. With her great leadership, the Westville community has come together on several occasions since this summer to plant hundreds of bulbs beneath their trees. Jessica notes that during daily walks, her daughter Ingrid, now four, “offers encouraging words, hugs and kisses to all of the trees we have planted over the last three years.” Indeed, there will be no shortage of love for Westville’s trees for many years to come, thanks in large part to the efforts of one extraordinary woman.

*Bjorn Fredrickson, F&ES 2009, was a URI Community Greenspace intern last summer. He now works on recreation policy at the US Forest Service.*



**Willard Street's newly planted trees.**

*Photo: Josh Schachter*

# Mapping Trees in New Haven

by **Eliza Cava** Here at URI, we are taking to heart an internet-age mantra: information should be free. You may already be familiar with our Greenspace planting sites Google map. We have now begun the process of converting all of our paper records from planting and surveying trees into a digital “geodatabase” that will eventually be searchable online. This geodatabase will allow us to collect, in one place, pinpoint entries for every single street tree in New Haven, including information on species, age, size, and where maintenance might be needed. Collecting the data in this way helps us solve management questions, such as “which neighborhoods need more tree cover?” and “how are we maintaining species diversity across the whole city so we won’t be susceptible to a blight or disease?” Soon, we will make a Google map available to the public displaying all of the information from our geodatabase. Users will be able to search for trees by location or species throughout the city.

This geodatabase was initiated by the City in 2000-2001, when a private firm was contracted to survey approximately 35,000 existing trees and potential planting sites. We received the geodatabase from the city in 2008, and since then have been working to change our own data-collection methods to be compatible with the Geographic Information System (GIS) technology that manages the information. Our Green-skills interns are now using computerized Global Positioning System (GPS) units to input data as they are out planting and surveying trees. The learning curve has been steep, but we look forward to smoothing out all the bumps, establishing, and sharing a full digital record of the City’s trees.

*Eliza Cava is first year Master of Environmental Science candidate at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. She worked in environmental education for several years before coming to New Haven. She is working with Stacey Maples of the Map Collection at Yale University Library to manage URI’s tree geodatabase.*



**Rhataya Cox enters tree data into GPS.**

**Top Five Species of Street Trees in New Haven**

- 1) Norway Maple (*over 5,000*)
- 2) Pin Oak (*over 3,000*)
- 3) London Plane Tree (*over 2,000*)
- 4) Red Oak (*over 1,000*)
- 5) Honey Locust (*over 1,000*)



**Inventory / GIS to Google**

**Queried trees (8):**  
*american sycamore (1)*  
*london plane tree (4)*  
73 ORCHARD ST  
87 ORCHARD ST  
genus: PLATANUS  
species: ACERIFOLIA  
comm\_name: LONDON PLANE TREE  
inv\_date: Sun Oct 22 20:00:00 EDT 2000  
address: 87 ORCHARD ST  
dbh\_2008:  
nhborhood: HILL  
cond\_2008:  
maint\_2008:  
reinv\_date:  
comm\_2008:  
dbh\_2001: 34  
cond\_2001: FAIR  
maint\_2001: PRIORITY 2  
util\_2001: LOW  
reinv: 0  
surveyor:  
plant\_org:  
street:  
street\_num:  
87 ORCHARD ST



**Google Project: Accessing Tree Data Capabilities**



**NEW HAVEN / URBAN  
RESOURCES  
INITIATIVE**

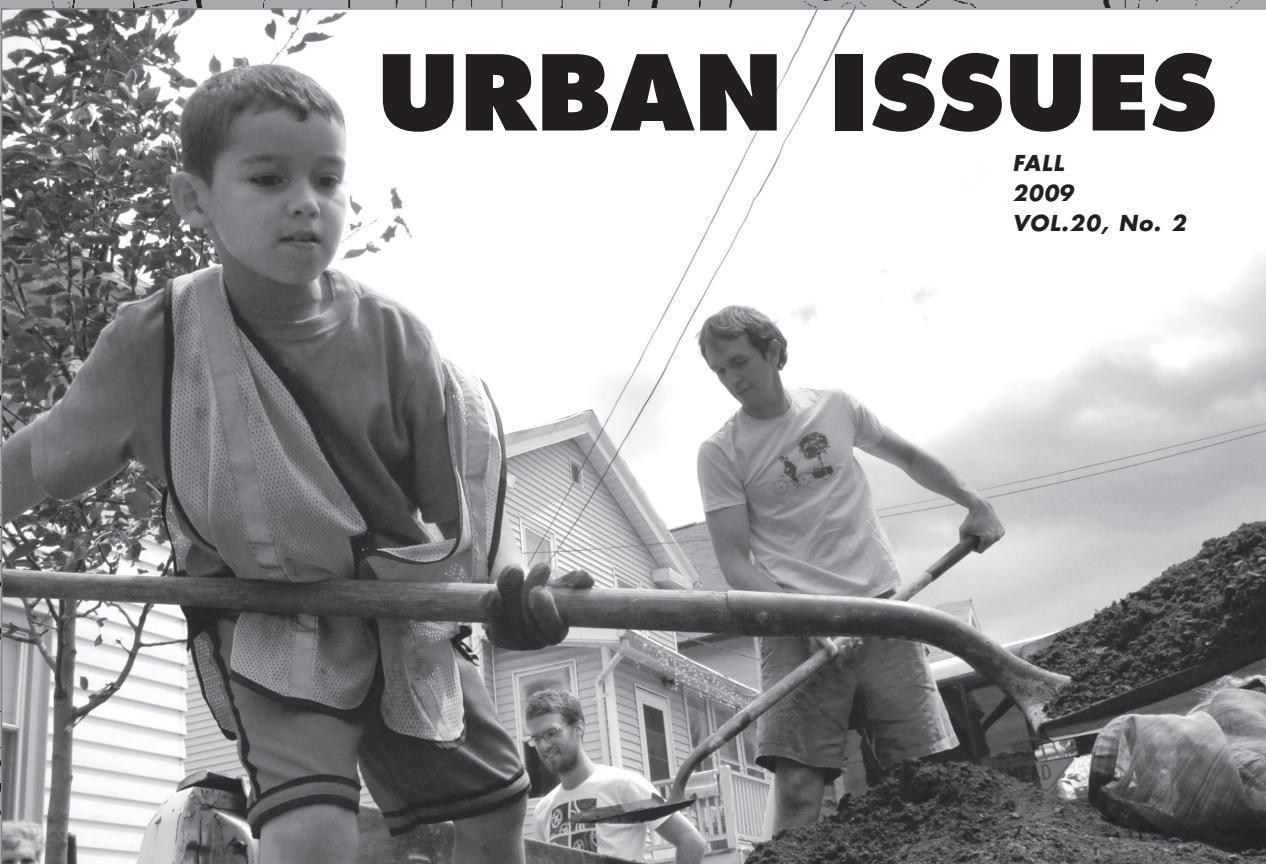
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