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**Hard Work Leads to Inaugural Year as 501(c)(3)**  
By Amy Samuels, Board President

Summer 2016 marked a major milestone in the history and development of the Onondaga Earth Corps. In 2014, we began to recognize that our programs were expanding to the point that it was time to begin the process of becoming our very own not-for profit 501c3 organization overseeing all necessary financial and administrative functions. Reaching this milestone would not have been possible without the support of so many. We are deeply appreciative of Onondaga Environmental Institute for being our fiscal sponsor for the past 5 number of years. We are humbled, ecstatic about and honored by the individuals, businesses, foundations, that believed in our ability to empower youth and young adults by providing environmental and community job development opportunities.

I used to say the OEC planted trees and grew people and community. Today we also grow people and community by tending rain gardens, maintaining parks, removing litter, preserving historic sites, shoveling snow and educating about water weeds. With much guidance and support from the local foundations we have been working to strengthen the resilience of our organization so that we can continue to serve youth and young adults in Syracuse's low-income neighborhoods. We have successfully been able to shift from being predominately funded by

# NEWS

Fall 2016

From Val-Kil, NY to Jamesville and back home to Syracuse again, OEC has accomplished another year of conservation work and job readiness training. For perspectives from all of our crew and staff, read up on this season's work, and stay in touch for spring job opportunities!

Don't miss the chance to catch up with all of the good times OEC has had this season on our [Facebook page!](#)



[www.onondagaearthcorps.org](http://www.onondagaearthcorps.org)

local foundations to a broad mix of fee-based work, grants, and board fund development.

Contracts and grants are important sources of funding, but they generally don't provide us with all the resources we need to support our staff and crews. Important components of our program, such as training, youth development, and youth leadership opportunities are supported by you through our fundraising efforts. This year marked the second year for two signature fundraising events; the Michel brunch and the Taste of the World event.

The Michel brunch is hosted by Jackie and Peter Michel with support from friends and family. It was and is a lovely time to learn about OEC from staff, board and crew, be impressed with the crepe making



*Left: OEC Young Adult Crew-member "John John" learned how to operate small heavy equipment as part of the project at Solar City this Fall. John-John started with OEC as a summer Youth Crew member and interviewed to participate in the Fall Young Adult Crew immediately after the Annual Banquet*





*Top: The Youth Crew celebrating a well-planted tree.*

*Bottom Right: The Youth Crew learning the technical points of urban forestry*

*Opposite Top: The Green Infrastructure Crew Celebrating a clean rain garden*

proWess of Gabrielle Rippey, get excited about winning something in the auction, enjoy the beautiful artwork created by Peter Michel and be warmed by Jackie’s hospitality.

October 22<sup>nd</sup> was a dark and stormy night. Basements were flooding all over Onondaga County, but inside Grace Episcopal Church, we were dry (and eventually warm) as OEC’s “Taste of the World” event unfolded. The decor was autumnal, the auction and raffles, awesome and the aroma of the delicious food from Altanoor, My Lucky Tummy and the Jerk Hut filled the air. The highlight though was the stories shared and rap performed by OEC crew members and staff. Who knew Ioane could rap? If you missed it or just want to smile with joy again, go the OEC website. If you weren’t able to attend but would like to support OEC, please consider making a

donation now at [www.onondagaeearthcorps.org](http://www.onondagaeearthcorps.org)

### **OEC Urban Forestry, Then and Now**

By Ioane Etuale, Tree Program Coordinator

In order to get a good sense of the tree planting progress, it is worth stepping a few years back and looking at the journey of how we got to where we are today. Like any great journey, we encounter hurdles on the way but out of those hurdles we continue to rise up stronger and smarter.

In 2013 OEC’s tree planting program reached its new height. With just a part time Executive Director, one full time staff, a part time project assistant and three crew members, OEC was able to plant **700 trees**, the same number of trees OEC planted in the previous 7 years.

Then 2014 was unquestionably a monumental year with the celebration of our 10<sup>th</sup> year

anniversary. OEC hired 8 Young Adults (YAs) and planted **1,120 trees**. Our roots began to spread outside our normal range as we made partnerships and projects with the Atlantic States Legal Foundation and the Village of Liverpool. We also became a full Conservation Corps member of the National Corps Network family. To top it all off, corps member Mokhtar Muhammadi received the “Corps Member of the Year” Award and our Assistant crew leader Allison Speicher moved on to join the US National Guard.

When 2015 came, the focus was on expanding our network and partnerships. We worked with L&M Training Center and other professional entities to offer a 100 hour urban ecology and professionalism course that ended with all graduates getting a job at OEC and receiving their OSHA 10 certification. OEC started AmeriCorps and HOPE Crew this year as well, working in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Gideon Putnam Hotel. By the end





## OEC Crewmember Reflections:

*“At school I heard that trees provide clean air and cooling, but I had forgotten it. This job gave meaning about the trees and the environment that I didn’t get at school. It made me think more about trees and care about them”*



of the 2015, 11 young adults received professional training and employment at OEC including 8 AmeriCorps candidates, **1,165 trees** planted.

In 2016 our tree program reached new heights again planting **212 trees** for the Town of Dewitt, **988 trees** for the City of Syracuse and **268 trees** for Solar City in Jamesville, bringing the total number of trees planted to **1,468**.

During the summer time, the tree crew maintained over **900 trees**. Each tree was watered, pruned and weeded every two weeks. The tree crew alone did not take care of all of these trees, other crews and community Adopt a Tree (AAT) participants eagerly stepped forward this hot dry summer.

The AAT program also grew this year. Notably, youth from the Yeshua Restoration Ministry adopted **70 trees** on the Northside in addition to individual homeowners who pledged to care for trees planted on their property. Others such as the St. Joseph Hospital maintenance crew, the Developmental Evaluation Center, and Dr. Weeks School were among the many organizations that voluntarily cared for multiple trees on their properties.

The true highlights for our season lies not on the number of trees planted but the relationships built and youth we empowered. OEC was fortunate to have such a positive group of young people to work with. We would like to see these young people successful in the future and hope to maintain connections in the coming months.

Have a great Holiday Season  
-Ioane, “The Lorax”

### OEC’s Youth Crew

By Juliana Quaresma, Youth Program Coordinator

Fall Youth Crew started with 6 participants and a long day of waste management at the Westcott Street Cultural Fair. But it is with pride that OEC reports a successful day of cleaning and composting along the streets in the Westcott neighborhood while the community celebrated its diversity and connections, a celebration non of the crewmembers had previously attended. Now they cannot wait for next year!

The crewmembers, 5 of whom had participated in the summertime, then shifted gears to urban forestry with training and hands on work. The curriculum

started with 10 hours of training, and moved on to over 40 hours of tree planting. The training started with meetings on team building activities, work agreements, project goals, and expectations. After the conceptual foundation was set, we could focus on more technical aspect such as the benefit of trees, urban ecology, tree biology, storm water issues, restoration of the Onondaga Lake Watershed, and the Save the Rain Program. The third part of the training was hands-on with the guidelines and standards for the tree planting in urban areas.

The youth worked in at least 7 neighborhoods in Syracuse: Strathmore, Southside, The Valley, North Syracuse, University Area, Westcott Area, and Salt Springs. The youth crew planted about 15 trees per work

## OEC Crewmember Reflections:

*“I learned that I started thinking more about the environment. I would be still littering if wasn’t by my experience at OEC. Today I don’t litter and think about the environment more”*

day on Saturdays. In the end of the season they planted a total of 82 trees.

In the fall, youth became tree planting crew leaders at the Strathmore community event co-hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension. The crewmembers, most for the first time, guided volunteers through the tree planting steps they had learned carefully over the season. The community event had about 154 volunteers and 101 trees planted in the Strathmore Neighborhood. Each year the Community Tree Planting event has been involving the Syracuse community in planting trees and understanding the services of urban forests. The youth were excited to be part of such an event, especially being crew leaders helping the community, as they shared a sense of pride to be part of such a community event. For them it was a great work experience to learn technical guidelines on the fieldwork and gain leadership and teaching experience.

## Green Infrastructure

By Adam Effler, GI Coordinator

The green infrastructure (GI) maintenance program finished the year with a total of 17 Onondaga County GI Save the Rain sites maintained. The program allowed both youth and young adults to develop both these technical skills of maintenance, and professional skills like time management, presentation, and communication.

The great extent of the GI program's efforts is supported by maintenance data. In 2016, the GI crew removed approximately 420 gallons of trash, and 1,152 square feet of debris. Over the course of this year's project, 1309.5 square feet of mulch were delivered to the various project sites. Additionally,

there were 8 dedicated training sessions that included project/program orientation, natural water cycles and combined sewer/storm water management systems, pruning, weed identification and conventional wastewater treatment training sessions.

The GI program offered opportunities for crew members to develop professional skills, while learning the more technical aspects of the standard maintenance procedures that are important for our field work. Our program staff supported this professional growth through a commitment to holding crew members responsible for their actions and expecting their willingness to follow program protocols. This was difficult at times as there was a great learning curve for individuals who had not yet been held to such expectations.

I personally have a fond memory of a young adult success story related to our work teaching professionalism to our crew. After the staff considered, at length, separating two crew members from the program, who struggled to work in line with our professional expectations, we decided to patiently attempt to keep them on to complete the program. Hugs were given at the end of the Fall session by crew members appreciative of the fact that they were supported to the end. They were given some chances to make mistakes and, in the end, they realized that staff stuck with them while they were being difficult.

I was left thinking that perhaps many of these young men are not given enough chances in life. For some of them, the opportunity to make mistakes and the opportunity for redemption appears to mean a great deal. Now, all of them have left the program knowing they had the full support of OEC behind them.



*Left: The Hands on Preservation Crew pose for a thoughtful photo, while learning about the history of Eleanor Roosevelt's work and contributing to the restoration of her estate.*

*Opposite top: Amy Samuels teaches the OEC Summer Crew by demonstrating that Onondaga Creek is a thriving, healthy water source in the eco-system.*





## HOPE Crew Finishes Strong

OEC's Hands on Preservation Experience at Hyde Park this year has taught six young adults to glaze, finish, and refurbish historic buildings. These young people have also obtained OSHA 10 certification, participated in several additional trainings to learn about the National Parks Association, the history of the Roosevelt Family, safety around chemicals and

## ABOUT THE ONONDAGA EARTH CORPS

The Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) is a youth development and employment program for youth ages 15 to 25 living in the City of Syracuse. As youth work on community and environmental service projects, they learn valuable job and life skills, community based problem solving skills, civic engagement, and environmental stewardship and technical skills.

OEC began in 2004 as the Eli MacDonald Green Team, a neighborhood initiative to beautify the community and employ youth. In 2005, the program changed its name to the Onondaga Earth Corps and incorporated the youth conservation corps model. Since then, under the leadership of many community collaborators, the OEC has become a leading force in revitalizing our urban environment through urban forestry, green infrastructure and outreach efforts throughout the City of Syracuse.

## DONATE YOUR TIME, TALENT, CAPITAL

Support the work of the Onondaga Earth Corps however suits you best! We are always looking for creative ways to grow our program. YOU CAN HELP! Visit [www.onondagearthcorps.org](http://www.onondagearthcorps.org) for more details.

professional skills like time management, budgeting and outreach techniques.

The HOPE Crew's ongoing project to refurbish the playhouse next to the Stone Cottage at the Historic Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt. This national park now has usable space to share Eleanor Roosevelt's story with the public. The OEC team refinished 14 storm windows, scraping primer and painting over 1,740 square feet of wall surface and repointing over 150 square feet of failing mortar. Now the building has new life for visitors of the park and the use of park staff in their ongoing education and outreach activities.

Many of the crewmembers also enjoyed learning how Mrs. Roosevelt's civil rights activism reverberated through history. They came away from this project with a new appreciation and perspective on their work and lives.

After the project was complete and the team was discussing their accomplishment, OEC heard a startling invitation. "I was thinking about next year," Tom Ballos, project coordinator with National Parks Service, said as the crew laughed. OEC may have some new *hope* for 2017!

## THE VISION

- Help youth understand the relationship between people and the urban ecosystem
- Engage youth in hands-on community and environment service learning projects
- Train youth for future jobs and careers in environmental fields
- Empower youth by developing their leadership abilities that help them analyze situations, solve problems and implement strategies to improve their communities.

## CONTACT

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