



*Ronnie the Rain Drop, as presented by OEC alumni John Darby, celebrating Save the Rain Night at Syracuse Crunch Game in February.*

### **OEC and Save the Rain at Syracuse Crunch, Syracuse War Memorial**

Did you know that the local American Hockey League team is very supportive of stormwater management in Syracuse? In fact, they skate on frozen rainwater everyday.

During a game in February, OEC youth and supporters joined Save the Rain at a Crunch home game to share our mission and educate others on the benefits and goals of the Save the Rain, Connect the Drops, and Onondaga Earth Corps programs. We reached over two dozen people and OEC and Save the Rain collaborated on trivia messages displayed on the action screens above the scoreboard in the center of the arena. A total of 5 trivia questions and answers displayed on litter cleanup and benefits of trees.

OEC brought alumni from the program, a first hockey game for many, to practice their public presentation skills and to share what they already know about the importance of picking up litter and taking care of local street trees. The Syracuse War Memorial is a unique place to discuss stormwater because it is one of two ice rinks in the world that recycles rainwater.

One of Save the Rain's most innovative stormwater capture projects is the cistern and rainwater capture system housed here. This ice rink stores rain that falls on its roof in giant cisterns in the

## **NEWS**

Winter 2017

Onondaga Earth Corps is at work this winter shoveling snow, recruiting for all of our programs, and planning a 2017 year full of important projects and good works. OEC youth alumni met, Save the Rain and Ronnie the Raindrop appeared at a Crunch game, and the OEC staff and Board have been training hard.

Keep track of OEC on our

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basement. Then, when the time for ice-making comes around, the facilities use the water to build the ice for the teams to compete on. This saves approximately 400,00 gallons of water a year from flooding the Syracuse sewer system.

This was certainly a night of fun for family, hockey fans, and OEC alumni. It was especially good to see Ronnie the Raindrop on the ice with Tully the Turtle, collecting hockey pucks from the enthusiastic fans.



*Ronnie also visited our Save the Rain Table, where we raffled Crunch gear for the benefit of OEC's Youth Program*



### **Snow Corps Starts Again**

For a second year, Onondaga Earth Corps is partnering with the City of Syracuse and the Department of Parks and Recreation to provide a more walk-able winter to our neighborhoods.

On snowy days our crew of young adults visits the McChesney, Feigel, and Greenway Parks on the Northside, Burnet and Skiddy Park on the Westside, Wilson and Kirk Park and the Southwest Community Center on the Southside, and the Cecil Center in the Valley. By shoveling at these centers and parks, OEC is making them more accessible for pedestrians and residents who use these facilities.

The Snow Corps is also working to gather information and educate residents in the neighborhoods surrounding our sites. The crew is regularly visiting homes and providing information, offering our snow removal services, and collecting survey responses.

The goal of Snow Corps is to address the issue of sidewalk snow removal here in Syracuse. Since the city places responsibility on the property owner for sidewalk repair and clearing, often, for a variety of reasons, the snow remains piled on sidewalks for days. This is particularly common at public properties or vacant buildings and land where nobody is present to shovel the sidewalks. Unclear sidewalks are not only hazardous to walk on, but force pedestrians into the street where they are at a much higher risk of being hit by passing vehicles. This is a problem which disproportionately affects children, the elderly, the disabled, and those living in poverty.

Our hope is to alleviate some of these hardships by clearing sidewalks, offering help to those who are unable to on their own, to educate residents about the importance of this issue, and to provide information for policymakers through the data we collect and interactions we have with Syracuse residents.

### **OEC's Growing Alumni Network**

**We asked crewmembers: What was the best part about the OEC program?**

**“ The camping” - Joe**



**“ The tree dance” - Jy'mere**



**“Meeting new people and learning new things” - Tyrell**





Before joining OEC to cheer on the Syracuse Crunch and share the message about stormwater management, OEC hosted a gathering of staff, OEC graduates and founder Eli MacDonald to share a meal and catch up. Youth and young adult graduates are invited to stay connected to the program, each other and their old crew leaders. This network and the connections made are valuable on-going support for OEC alumni as they move on in their educational and professional goals.

This year, as in years past, the OEC alumni put their heads together with staff to consider what could be improved or changed for next year's program. All programs and season were considered, and the youth were also invited to complete an individual, anonymous survey.

Although OEC makes a point of collecting opinions, good and bad, at the end of every season from each program participant, these brainstorming sessions are valuable for staff because they provide an opportunity away from the season's field work and deadlines to examine new methods or ideas with corpsmembers, and find out what lasting points of the program are valuable and which can be changed for the next crew.

Feedback from these sessions, and the end of season paperwork, is incorporated into OEC's operations through staff training, program planning, and crew schedules and fieldwork.



Above: A blank box

Right: Executive Director leads the OEC staff on a hike during team building at OEC Staff Retreat 2016.

## Staff and Board Retreats to Build OEC

OEC uses the wintertime not only to reconnect with youth and provide valuable winter services to the community. The team also works hard at the same standards as a crewmember: continued professional development, continued personal development, and on-going team building.

OEC staff spent two nights and three days at the end of the busy year focusing on the important lessons and foundations to be built for the coming year, in the Adirondacks. The team focused on strategy and outlining deliverables for the coming year, and enjoyed a hike or two as well.

This year, thanks to the Gifford Foundation's POWER program, OEC is also working to build capacity through thoughtful growth and an infusion of resources to technology infrastructure, administrative help, and training for board members. At a retreat hosted in Alverna Heights, in Fayetteville, NY, OEC board members reviewed the latest strategic plan for the organization and setup the foundation for the program to update the value proposition and focus on growth according to mission, with strengths and weaknesses laid out in a map.

"These opportunities are important to me, because I like to hold myself and the whole team here really, to the same standards we set out for our crewmembers. We owe them no less," Adrienne, Youth program coordinator, says.







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#### **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.onondagaearthcorps.org](http://www.onondagaearthcorps.org) for more details.

#### **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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