
OEC NEWSLETTER

Official publication of the Onondaga Earth Corps

End of Summer 2021 at OEC



OEC Crewmembers, OEC Staff, and Syracuse City Urban Forestry Technicians take a group picture at Kirk Park before an all hands on deck work day.

On August 12 Onondaga Earth Corps hosted our End of Summer Banquet. During the banquet, crew members were able to get out of their shell and engage in public speaking. Each crew presented what projects they had worked on over the summer. During each presentation crewmembers got a chance to express their favorite parts of the summer. It was great to see how excited they were and how the program really exposed them to new things and to new people.



It was amazing to see the youth shine in areas that were new to them. Some crew members were scared to speak but in the end they all overcame that obstacle. Overall, the banquet was a success. We were thankful that organizations we partnered up with throughout the summer came by to support us. We especially want to thank our friends at Mercy Works for allowing us to host our event at the Vision Center and to Las Delicias, Pastabilities and Mr. Biggs for providing dinner for our guests, staff, and crew.

Quan Petteway
OEC Youth Program Coordinator

Past Events:

OEC End of Summer Banquet and Graduation
Aug 12, 2021

ESF Day of Service
Aug 28, 2021

Upcomming Events:

OEC Application Deadline
Young Adult: Sept 9
Staff- Crew Leader: Sept 7
Staff- Admin Assistant Sept 20

SAVE THE DATE

Community Tree Planting
Oct. 30 9AM-1PM. Sign in at 8:30AM
Location TBA

Register Now:

<https://onondagaeearthcorps.org/fall21treeplanting>

Earth Corps Encore
Rosamond Gifford Zoo
Nov. 13 at 5:30PM-9PM ET
Become a Sponsor or Register Now:
<https://onondagaeearthcorps.org/earthcorpsecore/>

Thank you to our Sponsors

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Accepting Applications for Young Adult Crewmembers, Staff Crew Leaders and Admin Assistant

Young Adult Position:

OEC is accepting applications for our Young Adult (ages 19-25) program until Sept 9th, 2021. Applications can be submitted online at <https://onondagaeearthcorps.org/join-oec/jobs/>. This position is a competitively paid entry level position. Young Adults looking to apply will need to participate in REQUIRED Conservation and Professional Leadership Development training, which includes OSHA 10 Certification Training.

Staff- Crew Leader

Applications for our Staff Crew Leader Positions are due by Sept 7th. Applications can be submitted online at <https://onondagaeearthcorps.org/join-oec/staff/>. Successful candidates will demonstrate high standards, attention to detail, compassion, excellent judgment, and the desire to devote themselves to youth development/mentorship and environmental conservation.

Staff- Administrative Assistant

Applications for our staff Administrative Assistant Position are due by Sept 20, 2021. Qualified applicants should have a high level of communication skills, a strong attention to detail, and proficiency in microsoft office, gsuite, and database software. For a complete position description and to apply, visit <https://onondagaeearthcorps.org/join-oec/staff/>.

Applicants and applicant representatives can call our office for questions at 315-565-3797 or email us at info@onondagaeearthcorps.org



Expanding Green Infrastructure Participation with Training Opportunities

BY JESS ALIGHIERI

The summer program for our Green Infrastructure (GI) Crew started out strong this year with training at the Harbor Brook Wetland Site hosted by our colleagues from Environmental Design & Research (EDR) and Ms. Green Jeans. A thorough explanation on wetland identification, structure, soil composition, and stormwater runoff challenges within the city of Syracuse provided a strong backdrop to the imperative nature of the work facing the youth & young adult green infrastructure crew this year. A variety of other training opportunities were also provided throughout the summer program; site visits from Amy Samuels of the Onondaga Environmental Institute who taught the crew about raingardens plant ID, and invasive species management techniques. We also welcomed job panel discussions with members of New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA) who encouraged and educated our youth crew on the job opportunities opening up within water departments across New York State.

The GI crew worked on a variety of locations that included 15 of the traditional GI project sites set by the Onondaga County Department of Water Environment Protection (WEP) along with a small variety of city park sites that provided opportunities for the entire OEC crew to connect, work together, and conduct team building exercises that promoted team comradery, personal development, and opportunities to make new friends.



GI Youth Crew visit with the Onondaga Metro Wastewater Treatment Plant staff to learn about the importance of mitigating stormwater runoff.

The core of GI work consisted of maintaining 15 separate WEP sites through weeding, invasive species removal (Phragmites At James Pass Arboretum), and garbage removal. Approximately 111.67 cubic yards of weed & leaf detritus was removed from county raingarden sites and brought to the county yard-waste dump site. Furthermore, 370 gallons of trash has been successfully removed and disposed of, while 21 inlets had been cleaned & cleared to maintain their function in relieving the city's combined sewer overflows (CSOs) of stormwater runoff.

Towards the end of the season the crew got to experience a variety of project work, and training opportunities that subsequently increased their scope of understanding of OEC overall and park work done by the city and their affiliates. The GI crew expressed gratitude for the added bonus of getting to bond with other teams at OEC and their project work. This unexpected opportunity provided for the crew a break from the traditional, and encouraged comradery between youth participants.



GI Youth and Young Adult Crew arrive and pose by Leavenworth Park

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Schiller Park Restoration and Conservation

BY TAJ MARTIN

OEC youth crews participated in an invasive species removal project in Schiller Park. Crews cleared buckthorn and other fauna from over 2.5 acres of park land.

This project was a great introduction to invasive species for crewmembers, who were able to work alongside representatives from the Syracuse City Parks Department, SUNY ESF, Michael Grimm, and other organizations. Crews learned about the history of the park, conservation restoration, urban forestry, how to identify and remove invasive trees and plants, as well as safe and proper techniques for tool use.



Volunteers from the Bonadio Group and OEC crewmembers pausing for a photo after a day of restoration work.



Crewmembers and staff take a group photo after a day of working at Schiller Park.

A notable project at the park includes the cleanup of several trails that were dangerously overgrown and unsightly. The restoration and beautification project included clearing brick stairways leading up from the trail to the service road. Over 20,000 square feet of brick walkway was uncovered as well as taller invasive vegetation leading from behind the pool up to the Drumlin.

The biggest project of all was getting community members and volunteers involved and feeling invited into the space that they consider their local park, ultimately giving our youth crew a sense of stewardship which they will carry on beyond their seasons.



Before (left) and after (right) of a brick trail and staircase at Schiller Park that OEC Crewmembers worked hard to uncover.

The AmeriCorps Experience at OEC (Crew Member Voices)

BY JARED DUNN

Working with Onondaga Earth Corps this summer has been a blast! As a computer science major whose previous outdoor work includes weeding a little from my mom's garden and carrying firewood, I was way outside of my comfort zone. However, the staff and experienced crew members of OEC showed me the ropes (sometimes literally) and soon I could tell a sumac from a tree of heaven as well as anyone.

I was lucky enough to spend this summer working with two different crews. I spent half of the week with the Green Infrastructure crew, learning about and helping maintain the various rain gardens and bioswales that we have throughout the city. These sites are super important for preventing our combined sewer system from overflowing after heavy rainfall into the streets, the creek, and eventually Onondaga Lake. The other half of the week, I would join the Creekwalk crew, which has been charged with making nicer views along the Syracuse Creekwalk along with removing invasive species so that they don't crowd out the trees that we planted there in the spring.



AmeriCorps member Jared Dunn climbing a tree during a ropes training course.



AmeriCorps members Brian Cannon (left) and Jared Dunn (right) posing with a fish during a bioblitz event at Clarks Reservation.

As an AmeriCorps member, I got to come up with and lead a project of my own. During my work with both the GI and Creekwalk crews, I had come into contact with community members who were passionate about the sites that we were working on. They would often come up to thank us for getting around to the site or give us some tips about more work that needed to be done. I thought it would be great if these community members had some way of giving us their feedback before we visited the sites ourselves. So, for my project, I tested out putting signs up at several of our GI sites. The signs had a QR code that linked to a form where people could give updates on the status of the site (e.g., weeds?, garbage?, etc.). It was great to see enthusiasm for this idea from the community, OEC, and the county. Hopefully, in the future, we will be able to use more signs like these to further connect us to the community!

I had an amazing experience working with OEC this summer. I was pushed outside my comfort zone, I met some wonderful people from walks of life very different from my own, and I learned to appreciate nature in a new way. Thank you, OEC!

BY BRIAN CANNON

My name is Brian and I'm a student who is completing my final year at ESF. After the spring semester ended this year, I went looking for an internship position that would give me the skills and experience I would need to find a job in the conservation field after graduation. Onondaga Earth Corps has been exactly this and more. It has provided me with many opportunities to improve my leadership skills and introduce me to new areas and experiences, such as boat stewarding on Oneida lake and getting training to drive the OEC trucks.

The Americorps Experience at OEC (Crew Member Voices)

BY BRIAN CANNON (CONTINUED)

For the majority of the summer I was serving at Schiller Park doing a great deal of invasive species removal (such as buckthorn and grape vine), as well as trail maintenance. This was done in order to restore the park and make it feel more welcoming and safe to those who visited. At Schiller, we worked with Syracuse City Urban Forestry Technicians and fellow ESF students Jake Erle, Dan Patton, and Garrett Maynard who taught the crew how to identify local tree and plant species, so that we could be sure we knew what we were working with. It's very important to be educated before serving.



AmeriCorps member Brian Cannon removing vines from a chainlink fence at Roesler Park.

I think my favorite part about my experience with OEC so far was the day when the OEC crews from other parks came to Schiller Park. Part of that day was walking around the park with Garrett identifying edible plants and trying them out along the way. Though it was a hot day, we got a lot done and had the chance to relax at the end. Overall, serving with OEC has been amazing. I've seen myself go through a lot of personal growth over the course of the summer and I can't wait to take this experience and apply it in my future career opportunities.



Jim Maloney (2nd from the right) teaches youth, Neela Goodwin, how to climb trees, while Jared Dunn and Jahiem Moore watch.

Summer Along the Onondaga Creek

BY HANNAH KOWALSKY

This summer the Natural Areas Crew made a huge impact along the Creekwalk. We had one AmeriCorps Service Member: Jared Dunn, one Synergy intern: Eh Moemo Qui, one Advanced Young Adult Crewmember: Terrance Castro Valdes, and 3 Youth Crewmembers: Jahiem Moore, Neela Godwin, Divine Umuhoza. Enhancing the community's experience while using the Creekwalk, and maintaining the biodiversity of the area, are the two motivations for our work. We had a few main points of focus in our scope; maintaining planted trees, removing invasives, and creating better views of the creek.

Jim Maloney, Lead Supervisor at National Grid, taught us how to use harnesses and carabiners, tie knots, and safely work on steep slopes during the season. Which was a chance for the crew members to ask questions to a professional in the environmental field, as well as learn a unique and fun skill.



Crewmembers learn about greenhouse tomatoes from Jessie Lyons at the Brady Faith Farm.

Summer Along the Onondaga Creek

BY HANNAH KOWALSKY (CONTINUED)

We also had the opportunity to visit and volunteer with Brady Faith Farms for an afternoon. The Farm Manager, Jessi Lyons, taught us about common weeds, sustainable agriculture, and urban agriculture. This was an enriching and refreshing experience where the crew could learn more about the importance of eating locally grown produce.

At Kirk Park, we removed invasive species, cleared along the fence and around tree tubes using weed wackers, and hand tools.



Before, planted trees in protective combi tubes, overrun by undesirable plants (left) vs. after, Crew members removed the unwanted plants with hand tools and weedwackers. (right)

At the Oxford lot, we used ropes to remove vegetation, creating better views of the creek and maintaining our planted trees. We also removed vines that were growing along the entire fenceline.



Before, fence line at near the Oxford lot area overgrown with unwanted plants (left) vs. after, Jared Dunn admiring the day's hard work removing the overgrowth (right).

At the Oxford lot, we used ropes to remove vegetation, creating better views of the creek and maintaining our planted trees. We also removed vines that were growing along the entire fenceline.

We also developed our tree and plant identification skills, with most crew members being able to confidently identify ~10 new plants by the end of the season, including both native and invasive species. One of our youth crewmembers, Neela Godwin, took pride in being able to quickly identify all specimens in this makeshift "tree quiz" put together one afternoon.

The Creekwalk crew did amazing and meaningful work this summer. Besides the environmental and ecological impact, I saw every crewmember grow and develop in a meaningful way through this program. Whether it was through friendship with another crewmember, the #Fresh programming or progressing in leadership skills, I can undeniably say that each crew member grew personally, and professionally. The Creekwalk Crew had a memorable summer!

Elmwood Park a Hidden Gem

BY GREG MICHEL



OEC Crewmembers and Staff stationed at Elmwood park over the summer take a group photo.

Clear Views and Trails at Elmwood Park

Elmwood Park is a hidden gem within the City of Syracuse parks system. The park has been a site to make munitions during the War of 1812 and a “pleasure resort” complete with artificial lakes, concessions, amusement features, and natural attractions. This summer, the park was home to an OEC crew of nine based out of the old Mill Building. Led by Rashawn Sullivan and Eli MacDonald, the crew’s goal was to restore the delight of the park by improving visibility and accessibility to its trails and stonework.

With assistance from City Arborist, Steve Harris, and Forestry Technician, Garrett Maynard, our team identified several trails, historic staircases, and areas overgrown with invasive species to focus our efforts.

The crew got off to an impressive start clearing approximately 5000 square of privet and other invasive species along a section of trail that park patrons requested be cleared up for increased visibility and safety. Crewmembers kept up the pace all summer and according to crew leader and OEC founder, Eli MacDonald, “The youth was excellent! They did a lot of work. They were always motivated and thinking about what to do next.”



Local park visitor, Mary Marquis, taking a walk on the recently cleaned trail at Elmwood Park.

We asked one park visitor, Mary Marquis, what she thought of the work by the summer crew. Mary had a lot to say. “This is an old favorite trail for many years. I’ve never enjoyed it so much or has it been as easy to walk on with a walker. It’s never been this wide or easy to access. The work that OEC does is really important and more people need to know about it.”

In addition to clearing over 150 cubic yards of invasive species covering ½ an acre of parkland, the crew picked up over 1000 gallons of litter, cleared the baseball field fence line, uncovered 5 stone work staircases and cleared 800 feet of trail.



Before (left) vs after (right) photos showing the difference that is made from removing invasive and overgrown plants at Elmwood park.



Staff and crewmembers Hannah Kowalsky, Taj Martin, Terrance Valdes, Yvonne Chu, Eh Moemo Qui, and Jared Dunn (left to right) taking a photo with Kat Korba (center back) at her farewell party at Clark Reservation.

FAREWELL AND THANK YOU KAT BY YVONNE CHU

OEC would like to give a special thank you to Katherine Korba, who for the last year has contributed to our program in the best ways as our Program Coordinator and Specialist for Natural Areas. Although we are sad to see Kat move on, we are looking forward to seeing what she will be up to in the future.

As Kat moves on, she leaves us with the momentum to continue growing our program capacity by making room for us to expand our staff, and therefore our ability to bring on more young people and grow our ability to connect and educate the community on a greater scale.

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Redeem your returnable bottles and cans to one of our new redemption center partners: F-M Returnables, Express Bottle Return, Bottle and Can Retrieval, Papa Cans and Bottle Return. Ask them to deposit the \$ to the Onondaga Earth Corps Account.

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ABOUT THE ONONDAGA EARTH CORPS

When the Eli MacDonald Green Team was restructured in 2005 as the Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) for local communities, OEC was formed to:

- Help youth understand the relationship between people and the urban ecosystem
- Engage youth in hands-on community and environmental 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