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# OEC NEWSLETTER

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Official publication of the Onondaga Earth Corps

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## Fall Planting Tree Species Diversity

BY KATE LITTLEFIELD



Several dozen trees were delivered and stored in OEC's Garage space to be planted that same week.

This Fall season OEC planted approximately 658 Street and Park trees for the City of Syracuse! This is one of our highest numbers yet and really felt meaningful to hit such a high mark during our 20th year anniversary.

As usual, we planted a variety of species and cultivars in order to achieve a diversity of tree cover within the city. This helps to prevent large scale losses from tree death or decline due to pests or disease and creates an overall healthier and more interesting Urban Forest. We strive to plant as many native trees as possible, but an urban forest's resiliency can be improved by including non-invasive ornamental trees where they're best suited for aesthetics or where native trees may not thrive given the site conditions. (Continue on page 2)

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### Upcoming Events

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AmeriCorps Tree Pruning Event at Salt City Market Community Room, Sat. Jan 13, 2024 @ 11:30AM - 1:30PM

For an up to date list of events, visit our website at <https://onondagaeearthcorps.org/connect/>



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While tree diversity in and of itself is important, trees are chosen based on their intended location as well. In the Urban Forestry world, we're all familiar with the saying "right tree right place". This means that the tree's environmental needs, size, structure and litter (leaves and fruit) should fit within the parameters of the planting site. Some things we take into account when siting a tree are: tree hardiness, soil conditions, size of the tree lawn, what utilities may be present and where they're located, line of sight, amount of litter produced and aesthetics. All of these factors lend themselves to choosing which species are best suited to be planted within our city.

Taking these factors into account, let's take a look at what our tree spread looked like this season!

Some of our top planted species this Fall were:

- Carpinus caroliniana- Musclemoore
- Syringa reticulata 'Ivory silk'- Japanese tree lilac cultivar 'Ivory silk'
- Acer campestre- Hedge maple
- Celtis occidentalis- Hackberry
- Liriodendron tulipifera- Tulip poplar
- Platanus x acerifolia 'Bloodgood'- London Planetree cultivar 'Bloodgood'
- Ostrya virginiana- American hophornbeam

Some of the lowest planted species were:

- Acer grandidentatum x saccharum 'Highland Park'- Highland Park Maple
- Acer miyabei 'Rugged Ridge'- Miyabe maple
- Acer rubrum 'Redpointe'- Redpointe maple
- Cornus controversa 'June Snow'- June Snow Dogwood



There was a large variety of Malus spp., Amelanchier spp. and Ginkgo biloba cultivars that were planted, but those have not been included in the count since one species did not rank higher than the others listed above.

The overall review of the selected species distribution this Fall is part of a larger story of the Urban Forest as a whole. There are many factors that contribute to selection, some of which are mentioned above, some of which occur on a larger time scale. Some of the factors that stretch across the planting seasons are; what has been planted in the past, what has succeeded and/or failed, which parts of the city are being planted, and how does the species selection from each previous season play into the larger mosaic of the diversity of Syracuse's city trees.





# Understanding the Onondaga Lake Watershed

BY ELIAD KANE

At the beginning of this fall season, crew members and staff met up with Amy Samuels from the Onondaga Environmental Institute to learn about both Onondaga creek and its associated lake. Together, we went on a tour of the Onondaga Lake watershed, where we progressively visited areas along Onondaga creek until we finally reached the Honeywell information center at the lake. As we made our way down the creek, we had a chance to observe and discuss changes we saw in the creek as we moved closer to Onondaga Lake.

Another opportunity that we had this season to interact with Onondaga Lake and its watershed was when we met up with the Upstate Freshwater Institute. During this activity, we started off at the Honeywell canoe and kayak launch along Nine Mile Creek, where we collected a multitude of variables such as, temperature, velocity, pH, dissolved oxygen, etc. After that we went to Onondaga Lake and collected some water samples at different depths in the lake. After both of those activities, we went back to the Upstate Freshwater Institute lab, where we got a behind the scenes look at what goes on after samples are collected and what type of things scientists working there are researching.

Both of these days were fun and enjoyable for both crew members and staff and we hope to see more opportunities like this in the future.



OEC Crews wading in water with instructors from the Upstate Freshwater Institute.



Volunteers stand in front of Blodgett Elementary School after planting 139 trees in the Near Westside.

# Near Westside Neighborhood Community Planting

BY LOGAN REIDSMA

The streets of Syracuse are quiet and dark, it's approximately 6:30am, and sunlight is appearing on what is the beginning of an overcast fall morning. Four vehicles are driving near Seymour street in Syracuse, New York's Near Westside neighborhood. This is crew one and a few blocks over is crew two. Carolina wrens are singing in the tree canopy in between residences. For some, this is the earliest start time while working at Onondaga Earth Corps. Hazard lights from trucks coupled with idling diesel engines set the stage for site preparations amongst the members of the early morning crews. While to onlookers it may look like a vehicle is about to be towed it is actually the beginning stages of the annual community tree planting event organized by the City of Syracuse Parks and Recreation Department, Cornell cooperative extension and Onondaga Earth Corps.

As the day progressed into the mid-morning volunteers began arriving at Blodgett Elementary school, the headquarters for the event. Approximately 130 volunteers were signed in and given their tree planting locations. Yvonne Chu, OEC's office administrator, noted that the volunteers were wide ranging, "We had young little kids who were maybe just four or five and then we had older folks, folks who live in the community itself that we were planting, but we also had folks from outside as well." (Continue on page 4)

## Poetry Corner

The small tree grows tall  
Beyond our expectation  
To foster new life

BY MICHAEL WOLFE (CITY OF SYRACUSE FORESTRY TECHNICIAN)

Muddy boots, lost gloves,  
Sore muscles, frozen fingers  
One more tree planted

BY MEGAN GORSS (OEC CREW LEADER & ADMIN ASSISTANT)



Volunteers gather at demonstration sites to learn about proper tree planting practices lead by OEC staff and crewmembers.

Events as large as this have the potential for change on a large scale and help foster community. Visually, newly planted trees can appear aesthetically pleasing for some. The small act of a newly planted tree shows that investment is occurring. Traversing throughout the neighborhood, there were blocks that had minimal street trees on it prior to this event. The 200 block of Massena Street contained two hedge maples along the entire block. After the event, that same block contained seven trees of three different species. Around the area, newly installed sidewalks contained structural soils in certain areas to protect the investment of that tree planting and newly installed sidewalks. Structural soils allow tree roots to pass underneath the sidewalk in defined areas. This is beneficial because it helps address root zone conflicts for the tree and provides suitable load bearing strength for various infrastructure needs. Solutions as simple as this can help prevent future conflicts from occurring between sidewalks, trees, and neighborhood residents.

Owerrie Bacon, a crew member with OEC noted that the soil was good to dig in contrast from typical compacted soils in the street right-of-way. "You never know what you might run into. We might be pulling bricks out, big rocks, everything, roots, all that." A handful of Owerrie's tree sites were soil amended by Steve Tumber, A contractor for the City of Syracuse Street Tree Program, which helped the day flow smoothly and provide the best possible growing conditions for the newly planted trees. While leading groups of volunteers, Owerrie noted that his group noticed people inefficiently using tools and not knowing the next steps for their tree planting. "It made me feel like a better person because I just taught someone something," Owerrie said. Leading the volunteers was noted as a highlight for Owerrie. After conducting planting demonstrations, Owerrie was able to monitor the volunteers and adjust where needed. "That was a good part of the day, all my volunteers really listened and they learned how to plant a tree."

Overall the City of Syracuse has a composite tree equity score of 80. This scoring system was created to help planting efforts target areas where they might be needed most. American Forests, who helped coin the term "tree equity" explains, "a [tree equity] score indicates whether there are enough trees in a neighborhood for everyone to experience the health, economic and climate benefits that trees provide. Scores are based on tree canopy, surface temperature, income, employment, race, age, language and health factors. A 0-to-100-point system makes it easy to understand how a community fares." (Continue on page 5)



Tree equity scores in census block groups of the near westside neighborhood range from 49 to 84 with an average tree equity score of 71 showing that tree planting in this community is a great investment. Looking into the past, Onondaga Earth Corps has consistently engaged in work in this neighborhood. 10 years ago, in the fall 2013 season, Onondaga Earth Corps planted 452 trees throughout the city of Syracuse. Of those 452, 128 trees were planted in the near westside with a focus on the area around Elliott Park near Elliott Street, Putnam Street, Fitch Street, and Bradley Street. Fast forward to the present and in 2023, this area of the Near westside has the highest tree equity score in the neighborhood at 84.

Investments into the urban forest have all sorts of benefits to a neighborhood both socially and ecologically. Conversations occur around daily activities amongst property owners, business owners, municipal officials, service providers and residents in the neighborhood that might not have otherwise. “We are able to do that through trees which doesn't always feel tangible to a lot of people.” Clare Carney, the Community Forester with the City of Syracuse noted. Clare had a conversation with a cyclist who was riding through the neighborhood on Saturday who noted that these newly planted trees are an opportunity for the kids of the future. Those young people might rake leaves and earn some side money and engage with a neighbor they might not have found the opportunity with otherwise.. Memorial trees were planted by crew members too. Domni Blenman, an OEC crew member, had a conversation with a resident who had lost their son.

The Malus “Profusion” they were planting was in honor of them and intentionally picked for the pink flowers, as pink was their sons’ favorite color. These small intentional acts are extremely valuable for connecting people with their community landscape. “People recognize how they can create relationships with their neighbors that they didn't know before through those trees that were being planted that day,” said Community Forester, Clare. “People are looking to make those connections and events such as this provide the platform to do so.”



Volunteers work together to prepare planting sites by digging holes and checking to make sure the tree roots will fit properly.

Working with youth and young adults to engage with their community and raise awareness of environmental stewardship is one of OEC’s main goals. Volunteer events can be great vehicles to accomplish those goals. Amy Burke, a crew leader for OEC felt, “The more people who know about it the more likely there will be interest from other folks in the community who might want to participate in the future. It puts our face out there and I think that's the big thing.”

OEC hosts multiple volunteer events throughout the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County each year. Maintaining the urban forest is a community endeavor. Be on the lookout for next year's events where you can assist!



# Congratulations 2023 Fall Crewmembers!

BY YVONNE CHU

This fall the following crewmembers completed the fall season in good standing:

**Young Adult Crewmembers:** Owerrie Bacon, Domni Blenman, Tuffis Haliburton, Malik Jenkins, Omarian Leroux, and Kyle Rowser

**Advanced Young Adult Crewmembers:** CC Bloodwood, Adrian Reid, and Derek Rice

To celebrate the completion of our fall programming, staff and crew went bowling! Here are some photos from the 2023 Fall Graduation celebration.







Desired plants are protected and staked to give the plants the best opportunity to establish in the slopes along the Onondaga Creek.

## Work at the Creekwalk Continues

BY AMY BURKE

The primary improvement focuses at the Onondaga Creek Walk includes erosion control and installation of buffers, increase in plant and animal biodiversity, and creating visibility of the creek. The crew removed invasive species such as staghorn sumac, buckthorn, grape vine, tree of heaven and Japanese knotweed and filled the cleared areas with tree and shrub plantings like button bush, fragrant sumac, black gum, carpinus, basswood, persimmon, swamp white oak and chokeberry. These plantings are inviting to birds and animals with their canopy cover and some provide nuts or fruits that will also attract wildlife and increase biodiversity. Removing invasive species also serves the purpose of improving visibility of the creek for public safety and enjoyment. Plantings will help control erosion along the creek and will create riparian buffers that will help prevent street water runoff.

### **DONATE**

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#### **5000 High Fives**

Help us get 5000 high fives by making a \$5 donation per high five!

#### **Fund-A-Truck**

Donate towards our fleet vehicles. Fund-A-Truck goal: \$50,000

#### **Bottle Bonanza**

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



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#### **Onondaga Earth Corps**

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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

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