



SUMMER 2018

This summer at OEC has been a whirlwind of a season! Our various youth crews worked for six weeks all around Syracuse to maintain green infrastructure, plant trees, beautify community gardens, and much more. Meanwhile, our Urban Forestry Master Plan/ReLeaf Syracuse has been gaining traction as we kicked off a series of community meetings about the initiative. Take the [ReLeaf Survey](#) here! Don't miss the chance to catch up with all of the good times OEC has had this season on our [Facebook page!](#)



Follow us on social media to find out about all of our upcoming events and ways to get involved!



Clean Streets Crew Picks Up Litter across Syracuse

BY MAURICE HARRIS

This summer for Onondaga Earth Corps and Clean Streets was awesome! Clean streets consisted of nine members, two crew leaders and nine youth. The summer started off with the overnight camping trip and that set the tone for the rest of the program. The crew focused on the areas that have been known to have problems with litter. We tried to remain close to the Vision Center this summer and hopefully were a positive influence on that area. The crew

spent many hours weeding, raking, mowing, and doing litter pick up around East Raynor Ave.

The crew also spent many hours weeding, raking, mowing, and doing litter pick up around East Raynor Ave. and the Vision Center. Clean Streets focused on Lodi Street and Butternut Street, the Geddes Street area, and South Salina Street and Brighton Street areas. The crew made numerous trips to those particular areas over the summer. Clean Streets also helped out other crews over the summer. The crew helped weed, rake, and mulch at Onondaga Park, Geddes Street, Lincoln Park, and Kirk Park. The

crew also helped Parks with the youth at the Salt City Games for the second summer. The youth had safety training provided by DPW. Clean Streets also took an educational (if smelly!) tour of the Sewage Treatment Plant, the Yacht Club at Onondaga Lake and Watershed in Tully.



Bobby of the Clean Streets crew picks up litter in the grass

Parks Crew Makes Trash Fly Away

BY MARQUISE BROWN-THORNTON

This summer, the parks crew worked to maintain vegetation and to educate youth on the environment. We worked mainly in city parks such as Kirk, Lincoln, Barry, Wilson and Schiller. It was a great opportunity for youth that never worked before to gain experience. Being a part of the parks crew is all about teamwork so no one is ever left working alone!

My experience as a crew leader for the parks crew has been an honor because I didn't realize how much I motivated the youth. Every morning I would walk up to each youth and would ask them how their morning is going, just to make them feel important. I built a bond with the youth and it made me feel like a big brother—someone they can learn from



Marquise supervising a crew carrying loads of mulch

and take good advice from. All I wanted to do was make these group of teens realize that you should appreciate nature way more than think you should. I remember I created a game called "Trash Trash Fly Away!" it was the most popular game according to the kids at the recreation center at each park. The youth made 4 "human trash cans" and the rest were pieces of litter. The youth that are litter will run from one end

to the other until they're grabbed by another human trash can! If you're caught you become a trash can, and the last person to get caught wins the game who then also become a trash can! I made this game up to influence kids to use trash cans and to not litter because it's very bad and affecting our earth.

If we can get more programs like Onondaga Earth Corps it would really make a difference, and I'm glad to be a part of a great team!

Green Infrastructure Crew Accomplishments

BY MATT RAY

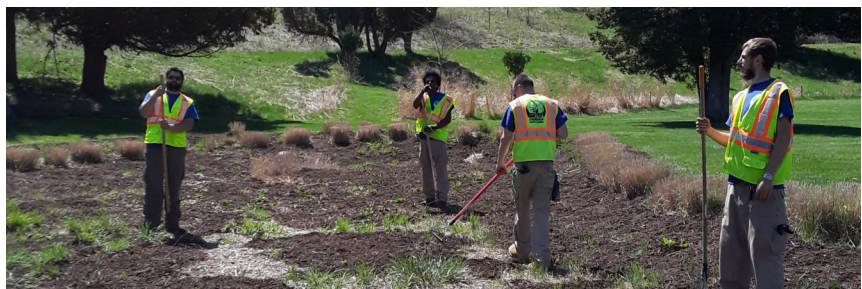
This summer, OEC's Green Infrastructure crew brought on two youth members, Samaria "Sam" Pam and Will Spinks. It was so rewarding to take part in their education and development as we tackled our array of projects throughout the Syracuse area. It was their first exposure to this kind of work, but their work ethic and enthusiasm was a more than welcome addition to our crew. It was also exciting to see our young adult crew members, who stay on through the spring and fall, develop their leadership skills with Sam and Will.

Sites we focused on contain rain gardens and bioswales which help to collect excess stormwater. Rain gardens are designed to capture and filter pre-

cipitation which otherwise would cause our sewers to overflow into the Onondaga Lake watershed. The GI crew is responsible for maintaining these gardens by keeping them weeded and free of invasive species. This knowledge of how the gardens operate, as well as the hands-on work necessary to maintain them, were all part of Sam and Will's experience with our crew this summer. We

were very fortunate to also have Amy Samuels, head of the board of directors for OEC, to give us tours of the Syracuse Center of Excellence (a model for clean energy architecture) as well as weekly clinics on plant and weed identification.

All in all it was a great summer for Green Infrastructure and we were proud to have Will and Sam along for the ride!



Matt supervising Ruben, Shane, and Caleb in a rain garden



Urban Ag crew with Jesse at Brady Faith

Urban Ag Team Beautifies Gardens

BY ASHMITA DAS

Syracuse is home to many beautiful community gardens. While they can often go unnoticed by the people who don't utilize them, community gardens are important in so many ways, acting as a social, educational, ecological and material resource. This summer, OEC put together a youth crew dedicated to maintaining and improving these urban agriculture sites across the city, including Brady Faith Farm, Jubilee Farm, and a number of [Syracuse Grows](#) gardens. The program was a successful pilot and will hopefully continue in fu-

The crew helped out with a diverse range of tasks and had many interesting learning experiences. From more traditional garden activities like weeding garden beds, planting flowers, pruning fruit trees, and mowing overgrown grass, the crew learned how to identify "good" and "bad" plants and the importance of setting aside room for compost piles. Then there were the less conventional projects, like building a "Lettuce Jacuzzi", which makes harvesting and preparing large numbers of leafy greens easier. By doing this kind of work, our Urban Ag stewards learned not only about how to grow food, but how to grow community and make a difference locally.

Rashawn Sullivan's Memorial Trees

BY SAPTARSHI LAHIRI

In June, OEC helped Rashawn Sullivan realize his project of planting memorial trees in the southside for victims of gun-violence in Syracuse. OEC crews were joined by Clifford Ryan from OG's Against Violence, the families of the bereaved, and of course Rashawn himself.

Rashawn was incarcerated for many years and had direct experience with the violence prevalent in the community, and felt the need to address this state of affairs. From a former employee of OEC named Tyrone, Rashawn found out about OEC and reached out to us. Following this, Rashawn and OEC were in conversation over several months about creating a living memorial, that in his words were a metaphor for growth and regeneration. Finally, after numerous site visits and meetings with families of the deceased individuals, we figured out a plan



OEC crew with OGs Against Violence at the memorial planting

to pilot these memorial tree plantings. Three trees were picked for three distinct locations - a hydrangea at Burt St., a tulip at the corner of Newell & Cannon, and a crab-apple at 114 Hutchinson Ave. These were planted by OEC crewmembers, as well as the volunteers who turned up to plant on a beautiful Saturday morning in June. The trees were partially donated by Atlantic States Legal Foundation, and by Chuck Hafner's Garden Center. A press release was sent out to alert members of the press to

the event, and WAER, the Southside Stand, and Spectrum News were on hand to provide news coverage. Everyone involved had a moving and valuable experience bringing Rashawn's vision to fruition.



Rashawn helps a child plant a memorial tree

Tree Team Summer 2018

BY KELLY WISE

The tree team this summer were tree lifeguards. Many of the days this summer were hot and dry and it was our responsibility to keep 800 young trees hydrated. Many times we pulled to a tree to see it hanging limp from heat. Every tree we watered gets 25 gallons of water every two weeks. These trees responded to our life giving water by perking right up. We felt as if we saved a life with every tree we watered.

This summer Onondaga Earth Corps brought on teenagers to help our crews and the tree team had two excellent young people join us. They brought an enthusiasm and energy that was like water to our crew who was tired after a busy spring of planting trees. We went out in the morning in two crews with 300 gallons of water and gas powered pumps to water in every city neighborhood. We also weeded and pruned every tree on our routes. It was fun to see the reaction of children when we opened fire hydrants to fill our tanks or played "tree" with kids in city parks while we showered them. We met such kind people everywhere we went and started charting our good deeds besides watering trees. We helped a

95 year old lady named Stella with her trash cans and filled a young boys squirt gun. We engaged with neighbors and kids everywhere we went. I can say the City of Syracuse is a city of good neighbors. I am so proud of my crew and how well they represented Onondaga Earth Corps.

Getting to know the City of Syracuse on such an intimate house by house basis has been so rewarding. Even on streets where blight is evident we found amazing beauty. Driving by doesn't give the same impression as walking our city. It was our pleasure to do outreach with Justin from Cornell Cooperative Extension to get site approvals for tree other members of the plantings this fall. One of our teens was so shy and overcame her fear by knocking on doors and interacting with neighbors. I was so proud of how far she had come and how outgoing she became.

Mayor Walsh asked the tree team to weed the tree pits on Geddes St. This took us two days and the work was hot and dirty. We had to weed between bricks very close to the

road. This hard chore was such a good lesson on work for the crew. We felt like victors when we finished as saw the scope of the work we had done. Mayor Walsh called us his dream team! It was so good for them to meet the Mayor at the luncheon hosted by the Mayor's office for youth hired to work this summer. All in all I can say through the sweat, dirt, weeds and water that this summer was fantastic!



Kelly helps Talmari, Sam, Will & Jahlaya plant street trees

AYA Pruning Team BY NICK GARTY



So'unique prunes a crabapple tree

OEC's Advanced Young Adult crew continued their pruning work into the summer and fall working under a new grant from Onondaga County's Water Environmental Protection agency (WEP). The pruning program, which started in the spring, allows OEC's veteran crew members to apply and build on their extensive knowledge to provide advanced care for city street trees. The work focuses on removing structural defects, such as bad branches or co-dominant stems, to increase the strength and longevity of the trees. Crew members learn how to identify Syracuse's tree species, but also to recognize growth behaviors, indicators of stress, and nutritional deficiencies in trees. They also learned how to use new equipment for trimming higher in the trees, and safe work practices that are standard in the tree care and landscaping industries including electrical hazard awareness.

AmeriCorps Boat Stewards Help to Keep Our Lakes Clean

BY ASHMITA DAS

If you frequent either Onondaga Lake Park or Oneida Shores, chances are you've seen several people standing next to the water in bright red shirts this summer, holding clipboards and handing out pamphlets. Those would be the OEC boat stewards, hard at work to keep our lakes clean!

OEC's boat steward program is a partnership with Onondaga Environmental Institute and is made possible through AmeriCorps and the DEC. It is one of many such initiatives in the state. Since the best way to deal with the devastating environmental and economic impacts of invasive species is prevention or early detection, watercraft stewards across the country work to "Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers" - by inspecting after they launch, they make sure that nothing new is going into the water and nothing concerning is coming out.

OEC boat stewards educated hundreds of boaters over the course of the season about how they could help keep our lakes clean by cleaning, draining, and drying their boats. Along with approaching



AmeriCorps interns (L to R) Ashmita, Khila and Alex pose with Amy by Oneida Shores

boaters as they pulled in and out of the launch, we also held a number of fun educational events,

including tabling along the park walking path, trainings at the Onondaga Lake Park Yacht Club, and a Lake Creature Field Day targeted at a younger audience. Of course, we learned many useful things from boaters as well, like what kinds of fish were thriving in the lake at the moment, or what types of plants were growing densely further away from the launch.

While the launches were primarily staffed by OEC AmeriCorps members, we couldn't have handled the volume of traffic without the help of our

many volunteers. Thanks to OEC youth, the local Sea Scouts troop, and assorted other members of the community, we were able to catch nearly everyone who went through these two launches, from local recreational boaters to out-of-state tournament fishermen - which is quite a feat!

As fall approaches, temperatures are dropping, waters are cooling down, and the boating season is coming to an end. Even though our days at the launch are just about over, the work we did this summer will hopefully have an impact for years to come as the individuals we interacted with remember the difference each and every one of them can make in keeping our waters clean.



Zynita, Shad and Jordan help Alex with boat stewarding



Boat Inspection!

Onondaga Earth Corps Community in Conversation BY MATT STEWART



OEC youth contemplate reading challenges with Matt

Sponsored by Humanities New York (HNY) and the Syracuse University Humanities Center, Syracuse University graduate student Matt Stewart joined the OEC staff and crew for the Onondaga Earth Corps Community in Conversation program over the summer. Matt, Greg Michel, Saptarshi Lahiri, Meqdad Abdul Ali, and Quan Petteway adapted a model from HNY to issue the “Two Page Challenge” to the OEC staff. Each staff member was asked to choose a short but challenging idea—presented in anything from an image to song lyrics to an essay, as long as it fit on one page—to present for discussion with a series of questions to the rest of the staff. The criteria for the idea was open-ended, so the staff ended up running discussions on a diverse slate of topics

ranging from gun violence in Syracuse to the poetry of Helen Keller to Michael Pollan’s “omnivore’s dilemma” to a discussion of the rapper TI and his attempt at urban development in his home city of Atlanta.

The staff met for two discussions and then led another discussion with the crewmembers towards the end of the summer. The topics were serious and yielded no easy answers, but they did allow for honest, face-to-face dialogue on some of the more pressing and personal issues on the minds of the staff and crew.

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 in 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.onondagaeearthcorps.org for more details or click [here](#).

THE VISION

Help youth understand the relationship between people and the urban ecosystem

Engage youth in hands on community and environment service learning project

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

AS ALWAYS, THANKS TO OUR MAJOR PARTNERS:

