

OEC NEWSLETTER

Official publication of the Onondaga Earth Corps

Looking up Through Memorial Trees

BY GREG MICHEL



Right: Rashawn Sullivan with volunteers planting a memorial tree in 2018.
Left: Cliff Ryan and OEC youth crewmembers after maintaining the tree in honor of Duriel Ryan.

“Learning about trees with OEC taught me to look up – at the trees and in life.” This is what Tyrone Cannon had to say about his experience with OEC back in 2013. Tyrone’s experience with trees and how he connected it to community members set off a decade-long conversation and movement towards memorial tree plantings in Syracuse.

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Upcoming Events

HELP US MOVE! Saturday July 15th 8AM- 12PM @ 488 West Onondaga St.

OEC is moving to a new building and needs help from volunteers! Sign up online: <https://bit.ly/OECsBigMove>

United Way Day of Caring August 3rd 10:30AM-1PM @ 201 Oxford St.

Onondaga Creekwalk Clean Up. pick up litter, water trees, maintain food forest and rain gardens, and remove brush along Onondaga Creek

Bottle Bonanza August 19th @ 9AM @ 160 Brookside Lane Fayetteville, NY 13066

Keep redeemable items out of the waste stream and out of the environment! Turn your bottles and cans into donations that support the mission

Earth Corps Encore SAVE THE DATE! October 14th @ the ESF Gateway Center

Celebrate our 20th anniversary by coming to our big annual event! Save the date!

Thank you to our Sponsors

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Sauve Brothers Body Shop**

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Tyrone introduced Rashawn Sullivan of iApologize to OEC in 2014. Through interacting with Tyrone and thinking about more meaningful ways to memorialize those lost in the community to senseless violence, Rashawn had the idea to plant trees in their memory. He wanted to get rid of some of the make-shift shrines of candles and liquor bottles and grow life in these spaces. After learning about OEC through Tyrone, Rashawn came to OEC to explore what we might be able to do together.

First OEC visited many memorial locations with Rashawn to learn more about Rashawn's concerns and vision. We then reached out to several families interested in piloting this idea and met with them to explore their visions. To date, iApologize and OEC have planted five trees and one shrub with families in memory of their loved ones.

One of the first plantings was in honor of Duriel Ryan, son of Clifford Ryan. Since Duriel's passing, Cliff has dedicated himself to interrupting violence through his work as OG's Against Violence. He has been walking the streets of Syracuse for decades now trying to curb violent acts before they have the opportunity to spark. We planted a tree at the corner Cannon and Newell where Duriel was shot

It has been five years since we OEC planted with Cliff to honor his son and this spring the OEC youth crew was back with Cliff to give the tree and the vacant on which it stands a little TLC. The vacant lot where Duriel's tree was planted recently had illegal dumping on the site. To remind the community of the importance of this site and Duriel's tree, OEC mowed the lot, picked up litter, added a fresh ring of mulch to the tree, and Cliff brought some fencing and solar lamps so it will light up at night. Most of our crew members were familiar with Cliff's work and happy to help out. They were encouraged with his comments as we wrapped up our session together. "You all stay on the path you're on. Keep doing good in the community like you are with OEC and speak up when you see wrong in the community," he said.

Speak up, look up, keep moving in a positive direction. The memorial tree work that iApologize, OG's Against Violence and OEC continues to work on is honoring lives, growing community and pushing us all to look up at the trees and in life.

Crew Leader Highlight-Memorable Moment

JAY HOLMES-PORCH



Young Adult and Advanced Young Adult Crewmembers harness up in preparation for bucket truck training. Top Right: Adrian Reid, Top Left: DJ Jackson, Bottom Right Malik Jenkins, Bottom Left: NyJheer Gunn

For me my most memorable moment was when we did bucket truck training. It was memorable because each crew leader encouraged each crew member to do it. Some crew members were afraid of heights but after calling out some crew leaders to do it and after seeing them do it, each crew member and leader went 70ft in the air. Everyone also tried climbing trees with the rope and harness. This day was full of laughs even though we had to go out in the field in the hottest weather we had this season.

Introducing New Staff Members



AMY BURKE (YOUNG ADULT CREW LEADER)

I've lived a number of different places in the U.S. I'm new to Syracuse and am enjoying it's community, history and local food culture. I have a service industry background and have worked for the Forest Service on a wildland firefighting crew. I'm looking forward to my work at OEC. So far I'm under a great impression of this organization! It's been a nice balance of work, education and fun.



EUPHORIA DOBBS (YOUTH CREW LEADER)

Hi! My name is Euphoria Dobbs (they/them) and I am a new Crew Leader for OEC. Prior to my arrival, I was a student at Le Moyne College searching for positions that had similar interests as mine such as activism and working in the Syracuse community. OEC interested me as a recent graduate because of its values of environmental justice, activism and giving back to the community. I am excited about starting this position and look forward to having a great summer leading likeminded youth!



NEIL ADAMS (YOUTH CREW LEADER)

Hello my name is Neil Adams Jr., and I am 40 years old. I am a father of two children currently in High School and Elementary School. I was introduced to Onondaga Earth Corps by a former member. I read the mission statement and through that this could be something that I would like to be a part of.

Looking foward to the NYS ReLeaf Conference

BY TAY STENSON

As we close this Spring chapter and gear up for our Summer season here at OEC, one of the exciting parts of our Summer programming is attending the annual NYS Releaf Conference. Some of my most fondest memories as a crew member here at Earth Corps have been from attending these events. Being able to travel to new places, experience new people and to see the various opportunities in Forestry is something that I'll always take with me. I've met so many professionals, learning the importance of networking and stepping out of your comfort zone. It really is an experience that I wish for all of our crew members and staff to experience at some point. I hope that it helps to instill some of the very confidence that I've gained personally and professionally. I hope it reassures them of how far they truly can go, beyond Syracuse's limits or anyone's for that matter. This year Releaf is July 20-22, we're hoping to send 5-6 of our folks this year, it is \$210 per person. We appreciate the immense support that we receive year round, especially financially to make these sorts of things happen. If you are willing and able to donate, you will be helping us to continue creating meaningful experiences for our members. Anything is appreciated, thank you and please be safe!

A Unique Experience

BY KATE ABEL

Onondaga Earth Corps has opportunities to work with and exchange ideas with groups both locally, and from afar. In mid-May we benefited from such an opportunity.

Tommy Mackey, a professor at Northland College in Wisconsin reached out to OEC this past winter. Led from a point of collaboration, his class of 9 environmental education students facilitated a basics of outdoor education workshop with OEC staff.

We met at Kirk Park, where they led us through reflection exercises, and recentered our group on the “big why” of what we do. Additionally, they shared simple tools for creating reachable objectives in group learning settings. Strong, clear introductions and conclusions go a long way in creating a positive learning environment for participants. The class followed this exercise by working alongside one of our young adult crews, planting trees in the Onondaga Creekwalk.

Staff were pleasantly surprised by the exercise, validating our experiences as outdoor educators. The biggest takeaway was the potential to connect the work that we do with our crew members and community. At its core, Onondaga Earth Corps is driven by intentional place-based work. It has always been about the people, and empowering youth and young adults in Syracuse to create change in this community, in a physical way. Syracuse is the tapestry, and trees are the medium.



Students from Northland College in Wisconsin work alongside OEC crewmembers for a shared learning and teaching experience near the Creekwalk and Kirk Park.

How our work changes through the seasons

BY KATE LITTLEFIELD

As Syracuse wakes up from the long winter, so does OEC. We transition from our small crew of Advanced Young Adults and Americorps members focusing on pruning to our typical crew sizes working on a range of project types. The spring brings a slow start as plants take their time waking up but once they start growing, we're in full swing!

We start the year off right with street tree planting. After all, OEC is known for its tree planting. It is a stark transition to move from the cold, sleepy pace of Winter to the hustle of Spring but we gear up and get it done year after year. Tree planting brings excitement, a fast pace and hard work as we get to watch the trees we plant change drastically over 10 weeks. Crew members have the opportunity to take notice as our trees go from seemingly dead sticks to blossoming trees full of life as flowers and leaves open up for the warm weather and longer days ahead. The smell of fresh soil fills the air as we plant each new tree.



OEC Project Specialist Kate Littlefield demonstrates how to plant bare-root trees at Onondaga Lake Park.



Crew member Adrian Reid sitting on the hillside at Schiller Park after picking up litter.

Our Natural areas crews experience the change of season as well. As the snow melts, familiar plants start popping up and we begin to recognize them as they change and develop into the plants we knew from the past year. It's shocking how different plants can look in the beginning of Spring compared to the end. We go through and get to see what survived from last year's plantings, what didn't and take notice of any new arrivals on site. The sounds of hand saws and shovels ring as vegetation is removed and new plants are installed in their place.

Green Infrastructure work starts out a little slow as the plants make their way out of dormancy but the work ramps up quickly as we enter further into Spring! The flowers and grasses in our rain gardens grow quick but the weeds grow quicker! While we start the season with cutbacks left from the fall, we hastily transition into edging, planting and weeding to keep our green infrastructure facilities looking fresh and cared for. The Spring season on OEC's GI crew looks like brown turning to green as plants grow, flowers bloom and grasses seed. It also looks like weeds getting bigger and trailers getting fuller but the work continues!

As quickly as the Spring season starts, it quickly lulls into a hot, humid summer with warmer temperatures and longer days as the sounds of wildlife and people once again fill the air.

Just like the seasons, our work is ever changing. As the temperatures shift and the days get longer our project work transitions too.

As we enter the summer, we step away from our focus on planting and step into managing our parks and maintaining our green infrastructure sites. Weeding, watering, pruning and vegetation management occupy the majority of the warm months when it's too hot to plant and when our sites are changing and growing the fastest.

While we're most well known for our tree planting, summer work brings a nice change of pace and a calm but contagious energy as we fully sink into the work we do during the hottest time of the year.

Summer at OEC looks like water coolers full of ice, a bucket of handsaws and loppers to cut unwanted shrubs and trees, filling tarps and trailers with weeds, spreading mulch, taking much needed lunch breaks in the shade and breaking the tinted safety glasses out of their temporary hiatus. It smells like humid air, the crushing and cutting of fresh wood and weeds and cook outs in the neighborhood as the smell of the grill billows into our work sites making us all dream about the food and ice cold drinks. It sounds like the pump starting up as water rushes from the hose to water our trees. It sounds like saws cutting through wood as the birds chat and summer break comes into full swing. People are out and about and conversations fill the quiet space of the spring while cicadas sing in the background.

But just as quickly as summer comes, we transition back into fall and enter into our final push for planting before the long Syracuse winter comes upon us again. The summers may be short, but we certainly know how to make the most of them.



Left: Youth crewmembers Sadia Uwase and Akeira Murray practicing their elevator speech to invite community members to an upcoming event. Right: Treyvon Nellons standing beside the Onondaga Creek after planting a shrub.

Bottle Bonanza Keep it Going!

BY YVONNE CHU

Between Jan 1- May 31, 2023, Onondaga Earth Corps has managed to collect a total of 23,131 bottles and cans to recycle and redeem as part of the Bottle Bonanza fundraiser. So far, OEC has raised \$2831.50 between the bottle redemption and through generous matching donors. OEC has a goal of raising \$10,000.00 by the end of the year.

There are three main ways to help us meet our goals and fill those bottles!

Become a matching donor.

1. Pledge to match our bottle collection amounts and set your limit by contacting us via email at info@onondagaeearthcorps.org or phone 315-565-3797
2. Turn in your bottles and cans during a bottle bonanza event. The next bottle bonanza event will take place on Sat, June 24, 9am - 1pm with a goal of collecting 20,000 units- potentially \$1000.00 in funds raised. Redeemables can be dropped off at the following locations in Fayetteville, NY: 160 Brookside Lane, 208 Redfield Ave, and 318 Fayette Drive.
3. Bring your bottles and cans to a participating bottle redemption center and tell them it's for Onondaga Earth Corps!

F-M Returnables; 202 West Seneca Street Manlius, New York 13104

Express Bottle Return; 2312 Erie Blvd East Syracuse, New York 13244

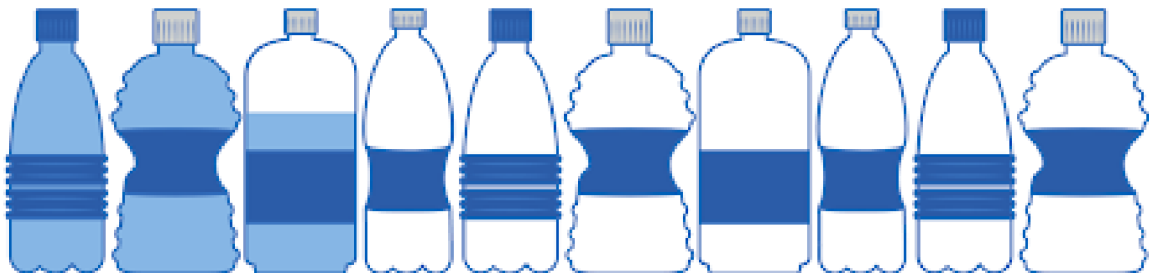
Bottle and Can Retrieval Center; 6222 Thompson Rd. Syracuse, New York 13206

Central City Bottle & Can Retrieval Center; 224 Chapel Drive, Syracuse, NY 13219

Cicero B&CRC; 6195 Route 31 Unit 2, Cicero, NY 13039

Here's Your Nickel; 2204 Brewerton Rd, Syracuse, NY 13211

Teall Ave Bottle & Can Retrieval Center; 1833 Teall Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13206



2023 Bottle Bonanza Goal \$10,000.00
One filled bottle = \$1000



Staff and crew get a demonstration from Henry Dul from the CNY Landtrust on how to build bird boxes.

Crew Leader Highlight- Favorite Experiences

BY ZOIE GOLD

When I first started with OEC in March, I was not fully sure what to expect. I had a description of the job, of course, and an idea in my head - but the basics of what we do, does not at all describe the day to day experiences we have. One of my favorite experiences was from the beginning of the season. During orientation, staff and crew members visited the CNY Land Trust in Skaneateles. Paul and Henry were very welcoming and led us in birdhouse making and a hike, well kind of. As we were driving up to the area to hike, we ran into quite a bit of snow and ended up getting two of our trucks stuck. We were able to get Princess out pretty quickly but needed a little more problem solving and teamwork to get Earl out. Our hike turned more into a lesson in how to get a car out of snow, with some hiking, after we freed the truck - which I have to say, took quite some time. Throughout this whole event, the crew members, crew leaders and Paul all worked together, using whatever tools we could find to get out of this situation. Small cones as shovels and car mats as traction were some of our very helpful tools. Creativity, positive attitudes, laughter, and communication got us and Earl through the snowy situation. Disclaimer, no trucks or people were harmed in this situation but, it did foreshadow a bit of what to expect going forward. Sometimes...well a lot of times, we have to get creative and problem solve with our crew to fix something or make up for

something that might be missing. Thankfully Adrian and DJ have been super helpful, positive, hardworking, and funny. We have been able to get through the day to day with their great ideas and help - while also having a good time and getting the job done.

Outside of the sticky situations, we had plenty of smooth days out in the field, especially as the season continued. It has been exciting to learn along with Adrian and DJ. Adrian, a bit more experienced in natural areas, was a great teacher and DJ was always interested and excited to learn.

Both worked hard and complemented each other, filling in wherever was needed. Now, DJ is identifying plants, doing demos, and teaching his fellow crew members. Adrian is always asking questions, engaging with our partners, teaching her fellow crew members, and always giving ideas to make the job flow a little better. All in all, working alongside my crew and seeing how much we learned together and from each other throughout the season has been a major highlight.

Crew Leader Highlight-A Good Season

BY ELIAD KANE

Spring 2023 was a good season for the youth crew. As a team, the five crew members, Akeirha, Sadia, Trey, Lavonne, and Kareem, were able to plant trees, remove invasive species, install erosion control wattles, as well as many other things throughout their eight weeks working with Onondaga Earth Corps. A highlight, and a truly successful workday, was on May 18th, where on a Saturday morning, the youth crew met up with Steve Harris, the city arborist, at Schiller Park to do some work on the lower and upper slope work areas. Together, we were able to install 68 erosion control wattles and remove approximately 2500 sq. ft. of invasive species from the park. Another highlight from the season comes from the time we had working with the Syracuse

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Urban Food Forest Project. Throughout the month of May, we had the opportunity to connect and work with multiple members of the Syracuse Urban Food Forest Project. The youth crew was first presented with some of the history behind the project, as well as a small showcasing of some past work completed by the project at Elmwood Park. This was then followed up by a weekend planting event, where the youth crew, as well as many members of different groups and organizations came together to plant a ton of different trees and shrubs at the Kwanzaa Garden, on the corner of Furman St. and Midland Ave. These two events worked well to broaden the crew members' understanding of the project and to see firsthand how through the intentional planting of selected trees and shrubs, they, and everyone involved, can work to positively change the environment of our city.



OEC and the Syracuse Urban Food Forest Project planted shrubs, trees, and perennials at the Kwanzaa Garden on Midland and Furman.

OEC's Spring Tree Planting Season. How Many and What species?

BY LOGAN REIDSMA

Seasonal transitions can be a welcome sight in Upstate New York, plants start their stunning spring show by engulfing us in a colorful arrangement of leaves and flowers, and people start to visit their favorite outdoor areas they may have neglected in the winter. Spring tree planting at OEC is a welcomed transition and creates many opportunities for our crews to grow as individuals.

Typically there are 2-3 tree crews planting hundreds of bare root trees for weeks nonstop, usually in April and May pending weather conditions. Park trees get planted, street trees get planted, and smaller dead trees are removed and replanted. Crew members are typically new to tree planting, and their crew leaders guide them through the steps for successful site set up and planting technique. Throughout this season, crew members were noted for their growth and engagement with the tree species they were working with. The first week a tree might be just a "tree", but after the second week the tree is now an Oak, and the third week the "tree" is being referenced as a *Quercus bicolor*. Crew member's observations are also heightened through their daily activities and they develop a real appreciation for street trees. For example, Eliad Kane, our spring 2023 youth crew leader noted, "This happened when we were going door to door doing outreach for the Kwanzaa Garden planting. It was a really hot and sunny day, and the youth really got to see in action how when standing underneath a large canopy street tree, it would make it instantly feel a lot cooler compared to standing out on the pavement in direct sun. It was cool for me to see them connect to the practical benefits of planting trees and why the work we are doing to develop Syracuse's urban canopy cover is important."

OEC crews are time-tested, and on a daily basis their resiliency is challenged in the field. One planting location might have remnants of the past such as roots from a previous tree or asphalt from a previous path while the next site has a small stump to work through. Each site is unique and our crews build each other up to find solutions in real time on site. An OEC crew's level of understanding within their landscape is constantly growing and applied daily.

Trees of all kinds were scheduled for planting in 29 out of 32 neighborhoods within the City of Syracuse. Approximately 36 species of trees, some with multiple cultivars, were distributed throughout the City of Syracuse demonstrating the importance of planting the correct tree for the correct space. The most planted tree species were serviceberries (*Amelanchier × grandiflora* 'Autumn Brilliance'), crabapples (*Malus* spp.), and tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). A few species of note included sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) and silver linden (*Tilia tomentosa*), which were not planted much last year.

Before the digging even starts, many behind the scenes tasks must be completed. Tree planting sites must be identified and inspected, typically months or years before the actual planting. Coordination with nurseries throughout the region becomes an important task so planners can identify what species are available to acquire. Then, field markout occurs a few weeks before the scheduled planting to verify underground utility conflicts. Sometimes trees are rejected due to utility conflicts, site conditions, or landowner concerns and planted in backup sites identified prior and during the planting season. All of this background work done by the City of Syracuse forestry staff and OEC prior to planting the tree is important to have dialed in so OEC can continue to help Syracuse's urban tree canopy where it is needed most, with the goal of a more equitable distribution of tree cover within the city.

Outside of Syracuse, crews planted trees at Onondaga Lake Park's northern and eastern edges to assist with the park's Emerald Ash Borer Management Program. This tree planting program was predominantly headed by the youth crew and a large community planting event. Species diversity and location were important components for finding planting locations with northern catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*) being the most heavily planted tree. With mature ash trees dying and being removed, filling the canopy gap that is created is of utmost importance. Trees planted in the park varied from mature overstory trees to smaller understory trees to help assist the forest of tomorrow with a multitude of canopy layers.

At the end of the spring season, OEC tree planting crews planted 254 trees for the City of Syracuse and 70 trees for Onondaga Lake Park. Through these efforts OEC continues to assist the greater urban forest in the Syracuse region through a wide variety of valuable environmental, social, and economic benefits.



Left: Kate Abel, Kate Littlefield, and Nuke Gunn receiving new street trees. Center: Tuffis Halliburton at the park with a newly planted tree, Right: Saleh Moussa with a newly planted tree.



A group of student volunteers kneel into the water at Maxwell Park along with their group leader Jim Maloney after planting trees and shrubs.

Maxwell Mayhem

BY MEGAN GORSS

Squelching boots, sucking mud, and scorching sun. Any of the 100+ volunteers and employees who put in work at Maxwell Park can tell you it had its challenges. Conditions were so miserable that we nearly had a mutiny (twice)!

Will the 500+ trees and shrubs we planted thrive or fail here? Hopefully as they settle in and grow, they'll help mitigate flooding, grow edible fruits and nuts, and provide habitat for the many species of birds and insects that call this place home. The saturated field we planted with red maples, black walnuts, swamp white oaks, dogwoods, viburnums, and cranberries will transition to a place where people can spend time without getting soaked up to the shin. The work done by a high school class, two fifth grade classes, and over 50 community volunteers will result in a place that provides better recreation, flood mitigation, habitat, and forage potential. Visit Maxwell Park yourself to watch these trees and shrubs grow into a whole new forest over the next couple decades.

DONATE

For more information, visit www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/donate

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.



@EarthCorps



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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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