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# OEC NEWSLETTER

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Official publication of the Onondaga Earth Corps

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## Weather and Climate Impact on Spring Tree Season

BY LOGAN REIDSMA

Planting trees appears straightforward at first glance, digging the hole, compacting the roots and then watching the tree grow. However, there is an entire system supporting those few moments that is impacted by weather patterns that span states. Typically, Onondaga Earth Corps plants bare root and Missouri Gravel Bed tree stock from nurseries located in Western New York and Central New York. OEC saw their first street tree planted this season on March 25, 2024. The prior two years, OEC's first tree plantings were on 4/17/2023 and 4/18/2022. This change in timing was in some part due to support logistical needs from our nursery suppliers that were weather driven.

In the Northeast, the winter of 23-24 was noted as a "record warm, record wet winter" by the Northeast Regional Climate Center (NRCC). "Three New York sites - Syracuse, Buffalo, and Albany - had their warmest February on record," according to the NRCC. This shift in temperature can impact the nursery's ability to dig and ship trees as well as the timing of the trees "waking up" or leafing out. Data from the USA National Phenology Network, showed the first signs of spring leaf-out arriving around three weeks early in Washington, D.C and in New York maple syrup farmers noted maple sugaring season starting weeks earlier than typical. The spring planting window is appearing to be less consistent with a shift with summer-like temperatures coming earlier and mild winter temperatures being more consistent, creating extreme variations in temperature in all in a few weeks' span.

With all of these temperature and logistical variables, OEC planted approximately 430 street trees during the spring 2024 season. Almost double the amount during the past two spring tree planting seasons, which is a true testament to the resilience and adaptability at OEC.

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### *Upcoming Events*

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#### **06/23 Volunteer Recruitment Meet Up**

All are welcome! Contact jackiegmichel@gmail.com to RSVP

#### **06/30 100 Bowls at \$100**

Fundraising event at 7595 Hunt Ln, Fayetteville, NY 13066

#### **07/01 Start of Summer Season**

Orientation Day at OEC for summer youth crews.

#### **7/13 Bottle Bonanza!**

Volunteers Needed! Locations in Fayetteville and Eastside of Syracuse.

#### **10/12 Earth Corps Encore**

SAVE THE DATE!

To get the most up to date events and information visit our website at:

**<https://bit.ly/eventOEC>**

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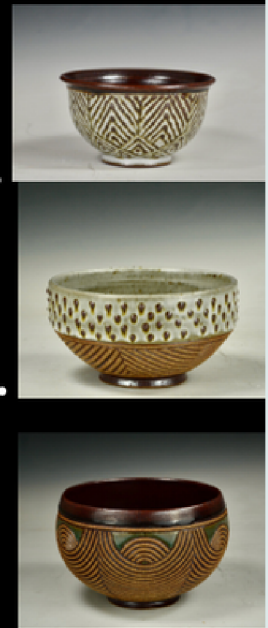
**100 BOWLS**



**\$100 EACH**



**100% for a  
GOOD CAUSE**



**David R. MacDonald** is professor emeritus of ceramics at Syracuse University whose bowls and other ceramic vessels have won national acclaim for their beauty and utility. His work, based on African themes, is featured at the Everson Museum and in many other venues around the country.

David has generously donated 100 of his (food-friendly) bowls to support the work of the **Onondaga Earth Corps**, a 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching young people in Syracuse how to plant trees and do landscaping while gaining business and personal skills. **As a special bonus, David will be there in person, as will members of the Earth Corps, who will share a bit of their story!**

Please join us to see this special collection and support an important community organization.



**Take home a beautiful bowl and support a great cause!**

**WHEN:**  
Sunday, June 30, 2024  
2-4 p.m.

**WHERE:**  
Home of Nancy Stewart  
7595 Hunt Lane  
Fayetteville, NY

*Outdoors in a lovely garden setting,  
with enjoyable live music!*

For questions, please contact Jackie at [jackiegmichel@gmail.com](mailto:jackiegmichel@gmail.com)

To learn more about the **Onondaga Earth Corps**, visit [onondagaeearthcorps.org](http://onondagaeearthcorps.org)

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# Welcome New Staff Members



**CONNOR CONDE**  
CREW LEADER

Hi! I'm Connor and I can hardly express how stoked I am to be joining OEC as a Crew Leader. I just moved to Syracuse this past January. I'm originally from Buffalo and my background is actually in laboratory science. Last year I found myself disenchanted with my biotech career and decided to take a leave of absence from my job to spend the summer as an Environmental Educator at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. There, I uncovered a passion for teaching, a dedication to conservation, and an insatiable longing to spend as much time as possible outdoors. Upon returning to Buffalo, I found that the life I had been living just didn't quite fit right anymore. I'm here now and I can't help feeling like I was meant to find this opportunity!

"I did not give to anyone the responsibility for my life. It is mine. I made it. And can do what I want to with it." - Mary Oliver

Indeed.



**BARBADU RAACHA**  
YOUTH CREW  
LEADER

Hi my name is Barbadu Raacha and I am a youth crew leader. I have worked with OEC a couple of times in the past years starting as a Youth Crewmember, a Young Adult Crewmember, an AmeriCorps member and now a Youth Crew Leader. When I first started working with OEC I was very shy and not very confident, but as time went by I started to get out of my comfort zone and faced my fears. Working with OEC helped me become more confident in myself and taught me how to work with others.



**DIANE FLOYD**  
YOUTH CREW LEADER

Greetings I am Diane Floyd, my active role and title for Onondaga Earth Corps is Crew Leader. I hold a Business Degree and hands on experience in construction work as well as various fields of walks of life. I am currently in the process of organizing a go green project and community programs. I have intentionally sought out OEC for top service hands on experience as well as knowledge and skill building. I am mostly looking forward to working side by side with our amazing youth and team peers. I greatly aspire to have a positive impact upon this phenomenal organization. I humbly appreciate Onondaga Earth Corps for having me; and also allowing room for space and growth. Thank you.



**KATHERINE HALLINAN**  
PROGRAM ASSISTANT

My name is Katherine Hallinan, and I'm excited to join OEC in the Program Assistant role! I am from Elmira, NY and was fortunate to spend lots of time outdoors in the Finger Lakes region while growing up. I developed an interest in environmental issues as I grew older and moved to Syracuse in 2019 to study environmental engineering at SUNY-ESF. I have a wide variety of work experience, having spent time working in a research lab testing hair products, interning at a mining company, and working on an organic farm. Most recently, I worked as the Innovation Programs Assistant at the Syracuse Center of Excellence. This role piqued my interest in non-profit work and solidified my decision to prioritize work that aligns with my values. I admire OEC's mission and look forward to supporting the organization to the best of my abilities!



# A Standard Day In Natural Areas

BY TERRANCE CASTRO VALDES

The day starts in the meeting room. You receive your assignment and go outside to retrieve the necessary and potentially helpful tools required for the removal of invasive flora species at your designated work site. Once obtained, your tools are placed haphazardly into the back of a work truck. After climbing into the cab of that pickup, you notice the mileage presented by the odometer on the dashboard. This number seems abstract, but it does cause you to ponder the previous (mis)adventures the vehicle has been a party to. While on the way to get your task(s) done the line between passenger and driver becomes blurred. You almost can't tell for certain which one these you currently are. This indescribable feeling doesn't last long though. It fades just as fast as it was made present.

As you reach the natural area whose stewardship has been left, at least partially, in your hands many thoughts flood your head. The loudest of them being the dread of the untamed and feral nature of the urban forest before you. You quickly go through a brief site assessment, scanning for the usual suspects of targeted invasives. You then participate in your crew's Safety Brief. It consists of tasking each team member with a designated role, aiding in the collaborative safety of the group; identifying potential hazards on the job site, making clear certain dangers you and your teammates will face during the workday; and contriving methods to mitigate the dangers of these aforementioned safety hazards. After this you take your tools and get to work. Hacking, slashing, and cutting takes a lot out of you, but there's still more to do. You take a break to get some water and notice the other crew members do the same. When it's time to go back into the fray you all unanimously agree to haul the brush out from the cleared area. Lunch time comes as you're establishing a groove in your workday. You half resent the fact that your momentum is halted as a result of this seemingly arbitrary 30 minute window you're required to stop working. The internal battle of weighing the options for lunch stirs around in your inner monologue for as long as it takes for you to acquiesce to the decision of skipping the meal portion of the break. You decide to focus on enjoying the intrinsic beauty that exists in nature. You pick a mostly empty spot on the ground to rest your weary eyes. You feel the earth beneath you. The soil breathes life back into your tired bones as you hear the crinkle of discarded foliage and miscellaneous plant matter under your body. Your muscles relax and you notice the warmth of the sun's glow favoring your face. Your presence shifts externally as you listen to the sounds of your surrounding environment.



Crewmembers work in a natural areas restoration project alongside the Onondaga Creekwalk a tedious and difficult task which includes invasive species removal.

You observe the audible calls of birds nearby, the buzzing of insects, and the loudness of internal combustion engines off in the distance. You open your eyes as your team starts to coalesce from their respective down-times. You join them. All of you swiftly examine the familiar environment and go over how to best spend the rest of your workday. You each split up and fall into your respective tasks.

Working together each crewmember finds their flow, leaning on each other's individual strengths to cover collective weaknesses. Operating in tandem alleviates some of the pressure your team faces in the natural area. As the ease of work seems to increase so does the playfulness of the group as a whole. You laugh, joke, and find pockets of time to share stories and experiences. All while keeping the main focus on getting your work done. As the end of the workday draws closer the group gathers back together. You all realize it's time to pack it in and head back out to add some finishing touches. A few cuts here, hauling out some fallen trees there, and you're on your way. Before leaving the worksite the group does a quick check for any tools that may have been left behind in the work area. No one signals that their tools are missing and the count matches the number the crew came with that day. You ride back to the office content with the tangible, positive change you were able to effect in your community that day. As you're putting tools away your mind replays moments from earlier, all the way from when you woke up to the present. You think back on the whole day. But you don't know if it took a whole day. Maybe it's taken two. Time seems to have lost its significance. After the trucks are turned off and all of the tools are put away your group congregates in the office building to acknowledge each other one last time before the workday ends. After this acknowledgement your focus shifts toward how you'll be spending the rest of your day. No concrete plans or ideas come to mind, but you know that you'll wake up bright eyed and bushy tailed after some well deserved rest. Ready to do it all over again the next day.



# Spring Tree Stats

BY KATE LITTLEFIELD

The season started off with a few unexpected surprises this year. Due to the rapidly fluctuating temperatures, our tree season was cut short by about 2 weeks this Spring! Since the majority of our trees are bare root, we have to treat them a bit differently than regular container trees. We have to work with their seasonal timing of leafing out or going dormant since they are more sensitive to changes when the roots are exposed and soil-less during transport and while waiting to be planted. However, even with losing 2 weeks in our season, we were still able to plant approximately 408 trees!



Young Adult Crewmembers Natasia Bowers (left) and Jeffery Maddox (right) finish placing mulch down on a newly planted tree.

We planted all across the city with 4 areas having the highest tree count for the season. These are the Westcott neighborhood with 69 trees, Eastwood with 64 trees, the Near Westside with 47 trees and the Northside with 36 trees. Westcott and Eastwood are outliers to some degree because there were large planting events focused in each of the neighborhoods. Westcott held 2 planting events in Thornden Park. One of them hosted a region 7 forestry professional workshop where Onondaga Earth Corps led planting demonstrations for folks within the industry. Eastwood also hosted a large planting event which was centered around a Syracuse Housing Authority property on Taft Road. Onondaga Earth Corps and volunteers planted 44 trees lining the perimeter of the housing development.

## Bottle Bonanza

Turn your bottles and cans into donations that support OEC!

### When:

Saturday July 13, 2024 9am- 2pm

### Sites of Collection:

Fayetteville: 160 Brookside Lane, 208 Redfield Ave., or 318 Fayette Drive; Syracuse: 204 Hampton Rd.

### Event Coordinators:

Pieter Keese (315) 289-6776, Greg Michel (315) 632-0080

Christine Sauve 315-877-5947 (Sedgwick)

### Instructions to Bottle & Can Donors:

Bottles and cans can be dropped off at the locations above or leave them by your mail box for pick up by 2:00pm.



# CNYCF Volunteers at the Creekwalk

BY JULIA SMITH, AMERICORPS MEMBER

To kick off the summer season, Central New York Community Foundation (CNYCF) volunteered with OEC for a morning of cleaning up trash, removing invasive plant species, and watering young trees at Kirk Park along Onondaga Creek. After setting up and preparing everyone with a project safety brief and breakdown, everyone was divided into three groups; trash picking, invasive plant removal, and watering crew. Prior to beginning our work, everyone was given a crash course on what invasive plants to remove, poisonous plants to avoid, and were informed on potential hazards throughout the site.

Almost everyone had the opportunity to help with multiple tasks. Once trash picking was completed, those volunteers gave a hand to work with the invasive removals. The watering crew wasn't required until after much of the invasive plants were removed, so they also offered a hand in plant removal.

With proper gloves and/or trash pickers, volunteers and OEC crew members collected trash found throughout our focus area. A total of 5 trash bags were filled by the end of the morning!

Examples of the invasive plants removed:



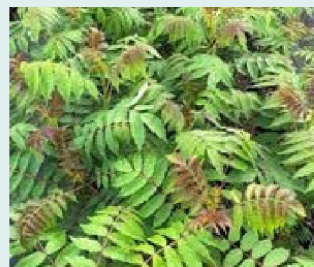
Tree of Heaven – *Ailanthus altissima*



Poison Ivy – *Toxicodendron radicans*



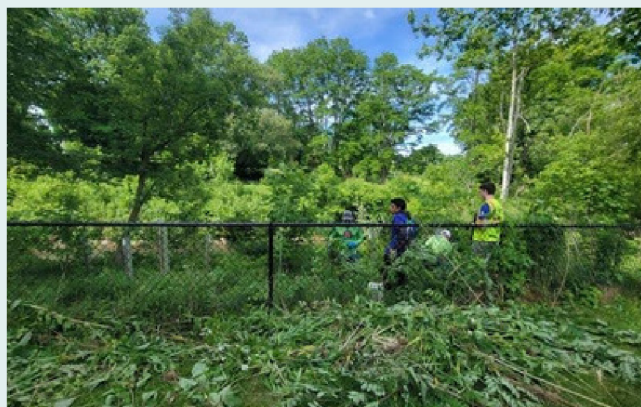
Black Locust – *Robinia pseudoacacia*



Staghorn Sumac – *Rhus typhina*

For watering the plants, OEC member Owerrie Bacon had connected a hose to a nearby fire hydrant, where he filled up five gallon buckets for volunteers and OEC crew members to carry to the young trees in need of watering. These young trees were previously planted behind the fence line along the creek, so volunteers and members had to carefully traverse through varying slopes and plants to reach these trees.

This event gave CNYCF the opportunity to give a helping hand to both OEC and our community by re-opening a lovely view-shed from Kirk Park to Onondaga Creek while cleaning up a popularly used park in our neighborhood. Furthermore, the connections made between individual members of OEC and CNYCF will only strengthen our community.



OEC Crew and CNYCF volunteers remove invasive species off the fence line and creek side



OEC AmeriCorps crew member Riley working with a CNYCF volunteer to remove invasive species from the fence line.



# Words from the Crew

BY KAHTREL GRIFFIN  
YOUNG ADULT CREW MEMBER

My name is Kahtrel Griffin. I came to OEC in April 2024. This is my first year in OEC, and from day one I loved these guys. They welcomed me with open arms, everyone works hard and gets the job done and it's all a team effort. We all go as a team, that's what I love about these guys. If you fall they'll be there to pick you up. They give us the best life lessons every day, and when the day ends they always make sure you're okay. My coworkers are the best, I wouldn't trade them for anyone, but the best thing is I always look forward to coming back to work.



"We all go as a team, that's what I love about these guys."  
- Kahtrel Griffin

BY KARZALE PULLEY  
YOUNG ADULT CREW MEMBER

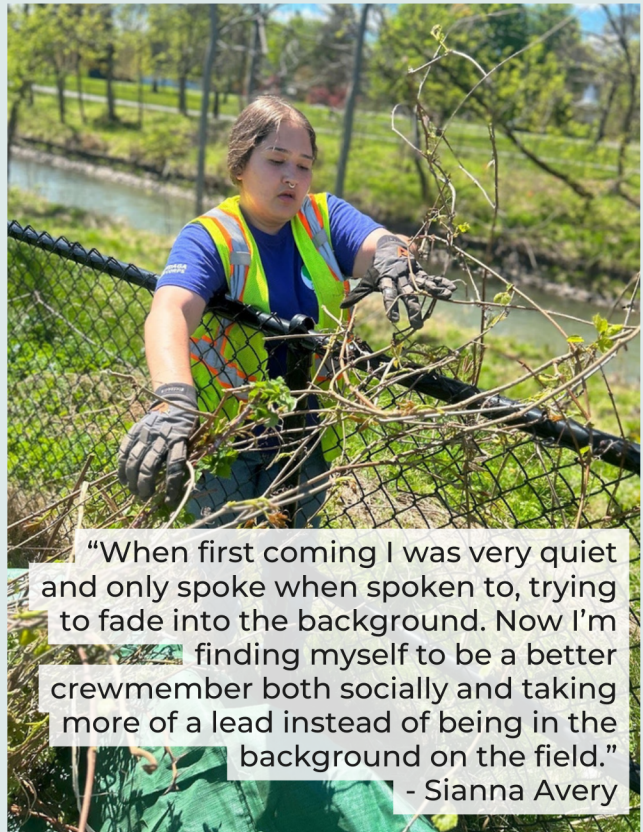
Hi, my name is Karzale Pulley, I am a crew member at OEC. I have been working here for about 2 months and I love the work I do and the impact I have on changing the community for the better. It has been a rough two months with planting in the heat and making sure our trees meet city standards.

I joined OEC to grow and make a change in myself and my community. We do a lot of work with the public and children of the community. I think that is my favorite part of working at OEC. Seeing the joy on people's faces and the hard work I have accomplished over the time. I hope to become a crew leader to show my leadership skills and how I can lead a team to success.

BY SIANNA AVERY  
YOUNG ADULT CREW MEMBER

Hi! My name is Sianna Avery, and I work as a crewmember for this spring and summer season 2024. As it is my first season here I've really experienced and learned quite a bit. When first coming I assumed it would be mostly superficial about trees and parks but I quickly caught on that its deeper than that. This job really teaches you about the different plant species, how they affect the environment, how different structures also affect the environment etc. And besides that you see how much this job means to the communities around the city. You can be planting a tree or clearing up rain gardens and parks, strangers will come right up and show interest in what you're doing. There'll be smiles and questions from them with lots of "Thank you!" at the end.

I also find myself enjoying being taught how to use tools I didn't think I'd ever pick up like a pick-axe or a weed wacker. Another thing I didn't expect was how I'm able to teach volunteers at the different community events and help spread the knowledge about what we do. When first coming I was very quiet and only spoke when spoken to, trying to fade into the background. Now I'm finding myself to be a better crewmember both socially and taking more of a lead instead of being in the background on the field. I really can't wait to see how far I can go in this workforce and I'm ready for more experiences.



"When first coming I was very quiet and only spoke when spoken to, trying to fade into the background. Now I'm finding myself to be a better crewmember both socially and taking more of a lead instead of being in the background on the field."  
- Sianna Avery



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# Woodpeckers of Syracuse

BY GABRIELA MIRANDA-DIAZ

As you're working in a forested area like Schiller Park, you might hear the occasional thud, thud, thud of a woodpecker. There are over eight species of woodpecker in Syracuse. The Red-bellied and Red-headed woodpeckers are the most notable due to their bright red heads. Scientists hypothesize this unique coloration indicates parental/breeding qualities. Woodpeckers are equipped with chisel-like beaks and scary long tongues to hunt for bugs inhabiting trees. Their tongues are so long that they wrap around the back of their skulls. The average tongue size for a Red-bellied woodpecker is 9 ¼ inches. Specialized bones and muscles allow their tongues to extend several inches past their beaks and acts as shock absorbers, so each time a woodpecker pecks at a tree it isn't being concussed.

Schiller Park is also home to Northern Flickers and Yellow-bellied sapsuckers, which are in the woodpecker family, but their eating habits differ. Sapsuckers have a sweet tooth. Although they eat bugs as well, the majority of their energy is utilized for sap collection. They create sap wells by drilling neat rows of shallow holes into tree bark. Sapsuckers prefer trees with thin bark and high concentrations of sap like birches and maples. Unlike Sapsuckers and the rest of the woodpecker family, Northern flickers do not peck at wood. They feed on ground dwelling bugs by using their curved bill to dig in the dirt. I've observed many Northern Flickers in Schiller Park. Their activity is centered around a tree near the Goethe-Schiller monument, which leads me to believe they have a nest there.

Like the members of Onondaga Earth Corps, woodpeckers support their community. They offer pest control. Red-bellied woodpeckers are attracted to Ash trees afflicted with the Emerald Ash Borer. They eat invading beetle larvae, prolonging the tree's lifespan. Additionally, woodpeckers create housing for other wildlife. They excavate tree cavities to nest in. They will only use a cavity once. Over forty species of North American birds and even mammals, like raccoons and bats, utilize old woodpecker cavities. Woodpeckers offer a myriad of ecosystem services that I can't list in entirety because this article is already too long. Next time you're out in the field, keep an eye out for sapwells, pay attention to the sky and movement in the trees. Our survival and happiness is directly intertwined with the ecosystem, so embrace it. Stay curious and open. Wisdom is found in nature.



Red-bellied woodpecker



Yellow-bellied sapsucker



# Vacant Lot Clearing - Service Project

BY RILEY KNAPP, AMERICORPS MEMBER



Director Katelyn Wright from the Greater Syracuse Landbank speaking with the OEC crew.



Left to right: Riley Knapp, Julia Smith, Terrance Castro Valdes, and Logan Reidsma

As a new AmeriCorps member with OEC, I got the opportunity to help with a service project for OEC on a vacant lot nearby on Shonnard St. When we first got there, it was clear that there was a lot of work that needed to be done, as a large amount of the yard had become overrun with vegetation, with a lot of it being invasive species, including box elder and buckthorn. There was also a stump from a tree that had been chopped down previously that had sprouted as a last resort to try and stay alive.

To get permission to clear out this vacant lot, we had to talk to the Greater Syracuse Land Bank, who owned this lot and a lot of vacant lots around Syracuse. The director of the Land Bank, Katelyn Wright, came out to the site to talk to us about the Land Bank and what they do briefly before we started clearing. The Land Bank works to turn vacant lots into usable properties, whether to build more houses, sell them commercially, or even to create community gardens. It was enlightening to hear about them and they were glad that we were offering to clear out the lot.

Over the course of around three hours, we managed to clear around 80% of the area of vegetation with loppers and handsaws, revealing burn piles and other trash that we hadn't seen at the beginning. We also removed a few metal bars stuck on trees using a sawzaw and got rid of the sprouting stump with a chainsaw. We cleared so much of the area that you could see the backyard of the next door neighbor, which was previously hidden. We also piled all of the cut plants into trailers to eventually be dumped, leaving the area looking significantly better than it had before.



Stump sprouts before service.

This project showed how much we can accomplish in the time we are given, which was my biggest reflection whenever I passed by it going to a different work area. It looks so much better and we removed so much in only 2-2 ½ hours. We left the area tired, sweaty, and with a few scratches, but feeling accomplished in what we were able to do and how this further benefits the community.

When nearing the end of our work on the project, we spent a minute talking to a passerby who told us a story on how one of our members saved the tree growing just outside of her home. It was leaning to one side and didn't look very well, but once our member came over and added some support stakes and took care of it, the tree is now flourishing. Stories like that is what OEC strives for. Helping the community by taking care of the green spaces and environment in the City of Syracuse.



Stump after clearing and cutting.



Guests from the 2023 Earth Corps Encore celebration.

# SAVE THE DATE!

## Join Us Sat. Oct 12, 2024

### Earth Corps Encore

Mark your calendar for October 12, 2024 to join us for our annual celebration, Earth Corps Encore. This year the celebration will once again be held at the Gateway Center on ESF campus. If you are interested in sponsoring this event, contact us at [info@onondagaeearthcorps.org](mailto:info@onondagaeearthcorps.org) or call us at 315-565-3797. More details about tickets will be announced this summer through our mailing list and website. Looking forward to seeing you there!

#### *DID YOU KNOW?*

You can donate vehicles to OEC. By donating a vehicle -- perhaps one that you have been meaning to sell or junk for awhile -- you help support the work that OEC does right here in Syracuse. Vehicles do not need to be in working order to donate them. More info at [bit.ly/OEC-Car-Donation](https://bit.ly/OEC-Car-Donation)

#### *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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#### *DONATE*

For more information, visit [www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/donate](http://www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/donate)

#### **Syracuse Trivia**

Get bonus points when you make a donation to OEC at Syracuse Trivia Company events. For locations and dates of participating events, visit: <https://syracusetrivialight.com/>

#### **Bottle Bonanza**

Redeem your returnables at one of the redemption center partners listed on our website. Or you can drop them off at 160 Brookside Lane, 208 Redfield Ave, 318 Fayette Drive, or 204 Hampton Road on 7/13, 9/7, or 10/19 this year.



@OnondagaEarthCorps



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