

OEC NEWSLETTER

Official publication of the Onondaga Earth Corps



Top left: Crewmembers visit the dinosaurs at the MOST in Amory Square; Bottom left: Crewmembers take a self-guided tour of the Erie Canal Museum; Right: Crewmembers are delighted by the sound and feel of a typewriter at the Onondaga Historical Association

Overview and Significance of the Summer Youth Program

BY TAY STENSON, YOUTH PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The Youth Program is an opportunity for us to reach young people when they're at the stage of entering their first/second year of High School and are figuring out who they are and want to be as an individual. OEC leans into teaching young people about developing a mindset for acts of service and giving back to a cause that is bigger than themselves (community). We provide experiences that force them to go outside of their comfort zone which can be very powerful. We, as staff members, crewmembers, volunteers, partners and board members, can influence others in the community and shape our environment in different ways.

This summer, I took each of the youth crews to local museums here in the city. The Salt Museum, The Erie Canal Museum, the Onondaga Historical Association, and the M.O.S.T. About half of the youth members did not know that some of these museums existed. We all learned about the richness of history that lies between the bricks that once used to be our roads, that once used to be a main waterway (The Erie Canal) running through today's Downtown Syracuse - that is now paved concrete. It was fun, they loved it. I enjoy teaching them facts that I knew and just watching them enjoying the experience.

(Continue to next page)

Upcoming Events

09/07 Bottle Bonanza!
Redeemable bottles and cans needed! Locations in Fayetteville and Eastside of Syracuse.

09/28 Food Forest Planting
10am - 12pm @ Corcoran High School - 5081 Reinman Road Syracuse, NY 13207
<https://bit.ly/foodforest928>

10/05 Mile Marketplace
Tree giveaways with the City of Syracuse Parks Department and more time and location TBD

10/12 Earth Corps Encore
5:30-9PM @ The ESF Gateway Center at 1 Forestry Dr. Syracuse, NY. Tickets available NOW for our annual fundraiser!
www.bit.ly/OEC Encore

To get the most up to date events and information visit our website at:
<https://bit.ly/eventOEC>

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In July, we collaborated with Onondaga Environmental Institute (OEI) to do a Watershed Tour in Tully, NY. Most of our Youth and Young Adult crewmembers have never been to Tully before, let alone at the Fishing Access Site nor did they know about the Tracey Lake Land Preserve. Our Partners at OEI, Amy Samuels and Stephanie Johnson, led a macroinvertebrate sampling session, while I led a session on what a watershed is and shared facts about the Onondaga Watershed.

We also collaborated with our partner, Monica Caves, at Upstate Freshwater Institute who led four sessions where OEC staff and crew had a chance to test different pH levels in Onondaga Creek and search for macroinvertebrates. Everyone loved working in the creek and finding different creatures.

I learned the amount of influence that I have on the youth in our program as the Youth Program Coordinator, by seeing just how important each moment is, especially when you only have 8 weeks of summer programming. Walking into the Fall season, I am mostly looking forward to witnessing all of the beautiful change --within our young people, staff and the trees!



Top: Youth and young adult crews along Onondaga Creek at Kelley Brother's Memorial Park in Nedrow, NY
Bottom: Youth Program Coordinator Tay Stenson teaching crewmembers about watersheds and how they function.

History and Impact of Green Infrastructure in Syracuse

BY KATE LITTLEFIELD, PROJECT MANAGER

You've likely seen green infrastructure facilities scattered throughout Syracuse without even realizing. To many, they look like a garden border or a planting bed within a park. Not only do they look good, but they're also doing a lot of heavy lifting by processing stormwater in order to reduce volume and improve quality.

Syracuse's many Green infrastructure facilities all stemmed from the Save the Rain program spurred by Atlantic States Legal foundation. Save the Rain was implemented in Syracuse in 2009 in an effort to address the pollution as a result of our cities combined sewer overflow. Syracuse is one of approximately 770 communities in the nation that has combined sewer systems.

A combined sewer overflow system is a piping system that essentially combines raw sewage and stormwater during large storm events. This combination of large volumes of wastewater often overloads the wastewater treatment facilities, leading to some of the raw material to by-pass the treatment facility and enter straight into Onondaga Lake. Green infrastructure facilities help to process some of the stormwater in order to delay it from entering the stormwater piping system or keep it out of the stormwater piping system all together. This reduces the volume of wastewater, which should allow all of the wastewater moving through the system to be treated at the treatment facility before entering the lake. (Continue to the next page)

The Green infrastructure facilities in Syracuse were built as part of an agreement to combine updated Grey infrastructure (wastewater treatment plants, modified storm and sewer systems, etc.) with the incorporation of Green infrastructure. This agreement was created in the interest of environmental justice. Many of the areas within the city that experience the highest volumes of stormwater and flooding are those that were historically red-lined. Because of the concentrations of large volumes of water being present in these areas (often called priority areas), they were the target locations to build new wastewater treatment plants. However, these treatment plants would significantly change the fabric of the neighborhood, would lower property value, as well as introduce noise pollution and unpleasant smells (to put it lightly). In order to address the higher volume of stormwater without doing further harm to vulnerable communities, Green infrastructure facilities were built.

The Onondaga Earth Corps played a significant role in the early days of Save the Rain. We performed outreach and education, did litter pickup, rain barrel design courses and rain barrel distribution in different neighborhoods as well as aid in maintaining the Green infrastructure facilities across the city. Even though the contract period of the Save the Rain Program has officially ended, Onondaga Earth Corps has continued to maintain the Green infrastructure facilities that now make up the landscape of our neighborhoods.

Although there has been a lapse in our contract this year, it seems that things are quickly getting back on track and you will see us out in the field again soon! The impact of maintenance is not only visual, but functional as well. Regular maintenance on these facilities is integral to their performance as stormwater processing sites. Our maintenance entails weeding, replanting, cleaning out overflow catches, picking up litter and removing excess sedimentation that runs off from the streets or surrounding areas, which if left unchecked, can significantly reduce the capacity of the facilities.

To the right are some before and after images that display the impact of regular maintenance.



Before



After

Green Infrastructure site at Oncenter Parking Lot



Before

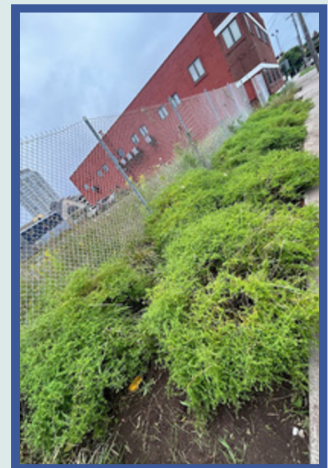


After

Green infrastructure site at Oncenter Parking Lot



Before



After

Green infrastructure site at East Washington

Words from the Crew

OMARIAN LEROUX, ADVANCED YOUNG ADULT CREW MEMBER

My favorite day of this season was the first day I went to Elmwood Park. I enjoyed myself. The main thing I enjoyed was the creek and how clean the water was. Especially compared to the water that you typically see at the Onondaga Creekwalk, especially if there was a combined sewage overflow outlet. It made me want to work harder to help reduce the stormwater runoff to keep the creek and lake cleaner. I also noticed that there were frogs at Elmwood Park, which means that it has a healthy ecosystem since frogs are sensitive and don't typically survive in a bad environment. There were also Rainbow Trout and Brook Trout. It also seemed like there were fewer invasives at Elmwood Park compared to the Onondaga Creekwalk. Because Elmwood is located in a valley it was also more humid than at the Onondaga Creekwalk. This summer day was my favorite day because I got to experience two different riparian zones and see some fish and some frogs.



NATAISIA BOWENS, YOUNG ADULT CREW MEMBER

So far my summer experience with Onondaga Earth Corps has been adventurous, fun, and hot. What I like most about this program is I have been able to experience things I have never experienced before. I learned about new things and met new people. Also, I had a lot of help accomplishing personal goals that I've set in my life.

We have been doing some natural areas work to keep our parks clean, beautiful, and tidy for ourselves and the community. This season, we were at Schiller Park removing invasive plants. Some invasive plants that we removed were Honeysuckle, Privet, Buckthorn, Black Locust, and Norway Maple. Managing invasive plants matters because we want to create and preserve healthy environments for ourselves and future generations of people and wildlife. Invasive species can lead to the extinction of native plants and animals, destroy biodiversity, and reduce or alter wildlife habitat.

We have also marked some native plants we want to keep. Native plants are important and we want to keep them because they can significantly reduce water runoff and consequently flooding. Native plants also help reduce air pollution.

Something new I tried this season was camping. While camping, I learned about new wildlife. I had a great time with my work crew and crew leaders at camp, especially during the games and activities. The most difficult thing this season was the heat. Some days it would be a little too hot and I wanted to give up, but I kept going. That is something I am proud of-I didn't give up. Always stay hydrated! My favorite outdoor place is the trails at Clark Reservation. What I like most about this place is the view, the sunset, and the sound of the birds chirping. I'm happy to be here, and I feel like the work that we have been doing is impactful and a success to me and the community.

Words from the Crew (continued)

KP PULLEY, YOUNG ADULT CREW MEMBER

What I like the most about the OEC program is our opportunities to network in and out of the workplace, interacting with the public and local communities --you know, just being able to stay in touch with my community.

I think my favorite days of the seasons were during tree planting season [Spring] but lately I have been working on maintaining the food forests around the community, and I must say, I think I like that a little more. Don't get me wrong, I like getting my hands dirty planting trees but it's just something about giving back to the community we grew up in that really sticks with me.

My favorite outdoor site that we visited is the wastewater treatment plant near the mall. It might seem weird but the reason I like this place so much is because it has many fascinating jobs and functions to help filter the water put back into Onondaga Lake.

My favorite plant, weird enough, is an invasive plant we call lamb's-ear. It is called that because of its really soft leaves and fuzzy hairs on it. For those who don't know why it is an invasive plant and why we don't want it around other plants, the reason is because they are self-seeding and they have creeping stems that root once they hit soil, so they could grow out of control.

I feel proud of myself and my team for the work we are doing and the major impact we are having in our community.



KAHTREL GRIFFIN, YOUNG ADULT CREW MEMBER

My name is Kahtrel Griffin. I have been working for Onondaga Earth Corps for 5 months now and I love it. This program is the best program for people who love saving the earth. My favorite thing to do at OEC is tree planting. When I plant trees it's the highlight of my day. I find it really therapeutic. In the future I could come back and show my kids what I planted.

My favorite day this season was the day we went on a watershed tour. We learned about how fast the water was going, how dirty the water was, and we caught crawfish. I caught 5 crawfish! It was really fun and really educational. The OEC project I mainly work on is clearing invasive plants at Schiller Park. The most common invasive plants that we removed were buckthorn, honeysuckle, and privet. It is very important to remove invasive species so that native plants can thrive and grow to their full potential.



A moment where I felt proud of myself while working at OEC is when my crew leader taught me how to use the forest clearing saw. This was something I have never done before. It was pretty fun and now I know how to use a clearing saw. One mistake I've made at OEC is when I was using the clearing saw and I cut one of the native plants. My crew leader taught me to go slow and stay low because the clearing saw is heavy. This method has helped me to avoid cutting native species by mistake. Something new I've done at OEC is going camping. I've never gone camping before and it was a really fun experience. I love working at OEC. I love my coworkers--they always have my back. Also, I'm saving the earth. Nothing better than that!

My Experience as a Crew Leader

BY DIANE FLOYD, CREW LEADER



Greetings everyone my name is Diane Floyd. I would like to share my personal experience that I have indulged in as a Crew Leader at OEC. Firstly, I'd like to mention I'm truly grateful and appreciative to have had this amazing opportunity to work with our extremely hard working and forward focused team. This overall experience has had a phenomenal shift upon my life's perception of what leadership building is. From my personal engagement of upholding a leadership position, I highly recommend that an individual considers taking out time to get to

know the team that they'll be guiding into success. So if oppositions and conflicts happen to arise, you'd know how to counteract, through any unforeseen scenarios efficiently and effectively.

In addition any person in a leadership position should consider the thoughts, feelings and opinions of surrounding partners; so that your team will feel seen, heard, felt, and understood to assure that your team knows that they matter and play an important role in the team. Validation is key. As a leader we have the power to impact and effect our team in an immense amount of ways through the dialogues we have. How can we impact our team?

Emotions and energy play a huge part of making an impact on a team. The emotions that you distribute onto your team transfers into the energy that everyone will carry as a collective. With that knowledge, we should make attempts to render light hearted, high energy, and positive vibes. This will cause a ricochet effect that will flow into the team and create cohesiveness and improve production at work.

During the time spent with my extraordinary crew I've acquired a plethora of enjoyable memories over the summer season. One moment that particularly stands out took place during our camping trip while my crew was making a campfire. I observed and interacted with my crew during that time and had many moments filled with laughter, thrills, support, and togetherness. It was a hands-on team effort.

Leaving this program, I'd like to share a few words that I hope will inspire the next leaders at OEC. Always continue to believe in yourself no matter the elements that stand before you. Your sheer will, intellect, and motivation will ensure your success on whichever journey you choose to pursue. Always and forever remain true to who you are.

Bottle Bonanza

Turn your bottles and cans into donations that support OEC!

When:

Saturday September 7, 2024 9am- 2pm

Sites of Collection:

Fayetteville: 160 Brookside Lane, 208 Redfield Ave,
318 Fayette Drive, 7890 E. Ridge Pointe Drive

Syracuse: 204 Hampton Rd.

Event Coordinators:

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

Maria Koster 315-663-5419 (E Ridge), Christine Sauve 315-877-5947 (Sedgwick)

Instructions to Bottle & Can Donors:

Bottles and cans can be dropped off at the locations above before 2PM





Summer Send Off Ends with a Banquet

BY YVONNE CHU, OFFICE MANAGER

The last day of the summer season at OEC took place on August 15th, 2024. Guests had a lovely meal catered by Don Juan's Cafe Restaurant, while crew members delivered presentations to an audience made of family, friends, partners, and supporters of the OEC program.

During one presentation, crewmembers led by Crew Leader Adrian Reid outlined their OEC experience by bringing the audience through a journey of things that they learned like plant ID of native and invasive plants, their work at Kirk Park and the personal development experience that they had, and the camping trip at the beginning of the season.

Although summer has come to an end, several youth and young adult crewmembers will continue working with OEC during the fall season.

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

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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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://syracusetrivianight.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 9/7, or 10/19 this year.



@OnondagaEarthCorps



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