

The GroundBreaker

THE LATEST NEWS FROM GROUNDWORK BRIDGEPORT

FALL 2007 EDITION



Executive Director's Corner

Throughout the year, the staff at Groundwork Bridgeport focused on serving many local youth as well as the elderly. The Butterflies Are Teachers (BAT) and the Individual Self-Sufficiency (ISS) programs engaged high school and elementary school students in real-world science and math problem solving, as they learned about nature and raised butterflies.

The ISS program, now called the **Green Team**, was able to provide Harding High School students paid, on-the-job landscape training at public grounds throughout Bridgeport. Students who complete our training are able to compete for Groundwork Bridgeport college scholarships. In September, we awarded \$4,000 in multi-year scholarships to two of our graduates.

The Our Folks program works to meet the needs of elderly, low-income, inner-city homeowners who are unable to maintain their yards. In the third year of the program, we added clients in Bridgeport and started a pilot program in Norwalk. By year end we will have made over 750 visits to help the elderly with mowing lawns, raking leaves, trimming hedges, and other basic yard maintenance. Due to the success of the program, we are developing plans to double the service level of the Our Folks program over the next three years.

Thank you for your support and help with all of our programs, and have a great holiday season and a happy new year.

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Groundwork Holds 3rd Annual ISS Graduation

The students involved in our Individual Self-Sufficiency (ISS) program, now known as the **Green Team**, have completed another successful summer of landscape training and work. The annual graduation dinner was held at Smolen's Catering on the evening of September 6th. The Green Team members are chosen from the Harding High School students participating as

mentors in the Butterflies Are Teachers (BAT) program during the school year. Approximately ten students showing progress, commitment, and leadership are offered jobs through the Green Team program for the duration of the summer.

The graduation honored first year students Juan Rodriguez, Michael Biggs, Nancy Edison, and Veronica Flores. Second year students included Luis Rodriguez, Jonneil Williams, and Robert Cloud. Students with three years of experience were Shanee Brown, Risha Brown, and Merylania Silva. Program Director, Joe Lanier, and Groundwork Executive Director, Richard Tiani, were at the event to award certificates to the students. The guest speaker was Mr. Steve Golden from the National Parks Service. Mr. Golden met the students last summer during their first ever hiking trip at Bear Mountain along the Appalachian Trail.

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Special to the graduation were two members, Merylania Silva and Jonneil Williams, who also graduated from high school last spring. Merylania and Jonneil were awarded scholarships to attend college starting in the fall. Both are currently attending Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport. Funding for the scholarships was made possible by the *Tow Foundation*, the *Tauck Foundation*, and the *Frederick A. DeLuca Foundation*. All three foundations are ongoing supporters of the Green Team program.

Green Team students attending the September graduation with Joe Lanier and Richard Tiani.



Back Row From Left: Jonneil Williams, Luis Rodriguez, Ted Bonet (2006 Graduate), Joe Lanier, Richard Tiani. Front Row: Merylania Silva, Risha Brown, Shanee Brown, Juan Rodriguez, Michael Biggs

Starting the Green Team Initiative

Groundwork Bridgeport and the National Park Service (NPS) have been working together to develop a more extensive program for high school age youth. Our partners at the NPS were impressed by the Individual-Self Sufficiency (ISS) program that has been successful for the past four years.

The ISS program is an opportunity for the students from Harding High School who act as our mentors and instructors for the Butterflies Are Teachers (BAT) program to be chosen for a summer job-training program. Approximately 10-12 students who excel during the school year are chosen to participate in the ISS/Summer Jobs program and are paid for their work. Throughout the spring, the ISS students receive

training in landscape design and maintenance. During the summer, students work for Groundwork on projects around the city, including maintaining our butterfly gardens at local elementary schools.

Last summer, with the help of the NPS, Groundwork Bridgeport launched the **Green Team** initiative. Using the ISS model, our students are now also part of the national Groundwork Green Team. In addition to the regular summer landscaping work, students had several opportunities to explore nature outside of Bridgeport. The Green Team participated in four work days at Weir Farm, the only National Park in Connecticut. Students worked building and maintaining trails and were able to learn about career opportunities from NPS employees. Even more exciting was a trip to Bear Mountain State Park where the students hiked to the summit of Bear Mountain. The trip was the first time any of the students had ever been hiking, and everyone was very proud to have accomplished such a big feat. The students were also able to talk with and learn from NPS employees about the National Parks System, nature, and job opportunities. The event was such a success that it was covered in the Sept.-Oct. issue of "A.T. Journeys," a magazine produced by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.



Green Team students, Luis Rodriguez and Jonneil Williams, admire the view from atop Bear Mountain.



Our Folks: Successful and Growing

The third season of the Our Folks program is winding down and some exciting developments have taken place. Due to the success of the program in Bridgeport, we were asked by the *Fairfield County Community Foundation* to pilot the program in Norwalk. The Norwalk Senior Center connected Groundwork with approximately twenty clients in Norwalk, and the *Fairfield County Community Foundation* provided the funding for the expansion. The initial season in Norwalk went well, and we are now taking on more clients and working to make the expansion permanent.

The Our Folks program is also very busy in Bridgeport, and we are proud to say that we have a full schedule of clients every day. The Bridgeport operation was again funded by a grant from the *Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging*. Groundwork has also applied for a grant for additional funding from the National Parks Service, which would support operations in Bridgeport and Norwalk.

We are extremely proud of the Our Folks program for the service it offers to seniors in our community. Many elderly individuals often do not have family or friends in the area to turn to for help. Lawn and yard maintenance is vital for homeowners to have a safe living environment, which also allows them to stay at home and avoid assisted living. Because of the need for such services, we would like to expand the capacity of the Our Folks program. To help us with the expansion, we applied to the Yale Graduate School of Management's Outreach program. Yale students have the opportunity to gain real project experience by working in teams as pro bono consultants for non-profit organizations. Groundwork's proposal to expand the Our Folks program was accepted, and the students will conduct the necessary research to create a business plan for the launch of a larger Our Folks program, which we plan to implement in April 2008.



Groundwork employee William Dudley (left) with Our Folks client John Wilkinson (right).



New Staff Arrival

Each August, Groundwork Bridgeport receives a Jesuit Volunteer to work as a Community Organizer for one year. Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC) is a program that works to recruit and place volunteers in grassroots organizations across the country to provide services in low-income and marginalized communities. This is the 4th year Groundwork has been selected as a JVC placement and received a volunteer.

A note from our JV:

In August, I took my first trip to the East Coast to join the staff at Groundwork Bridgeport. I was born and raised in central Montana and recently graduated from Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA, where I studied International Business and

Marketing. At school, I spent much of my time participating in intramural sports and mentoring local youth through the Campus Kids program.

Before graduation, I applied to JVC in the East and was placed with Groundwork. With my Big Sky roots, a job that uses my experience in the outdoors has been a great fit. I live right here in Bridgeport with four other JVs. My housemates work at other placements in Bridgeport including Prospect House, Kolbe Cathedral High School, Fairfield County Environmental Justice Network, and the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. I will be at Groundwork until August 2008 and am looking forward to many exciting activities over the next year.

Emily Roche, Community Organizer

Wish List

- ✓ Used Truck
- ✓ Used Lawn Mowers
- ✓ Leaf Blowers
- ✓ Weed Whacker
- ✓ Wheelbarrows
- ✓ Used Computer (please, no technology over 4 years old)
- ✓ Digital Camera
- ✓ Laser Printer

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Groundwork Bridgeport Board of Directors has recently lost two members. We are currently seeking to fill the positions. If you, or anyone you know, would be interested in learning more about our organization and possibly joining our board please let us know. Groundwork is looking for people who are motivated and excited about our mission to help us continue making a difference in our community. Call us at (203) 335-6126!



Fall Park City Sweep, Another Success

Once again, the Fall Park City Sweep was a successful event. The event was held on the morning of Saturday, October 20th. Over one hundred volunteers participated at thirteen different sites around the city. With so many great participants, we were able to accomplish a lot of work around the city. Volunteers worked with teachers and students at six different schools to clean, maintain, and plant materials in the gardens built for the Butterflies Are Teachers (BAT) program. We also encourage local groups around the city to participate during the Park City Sweep. We provide items such as tools, gloves, and trash pick-up for neighborhood groups who participating. Clean-ups took place at the following locations:



- Beardsley Elementary School
- Read Elementary School
- Luis Munoz Marin Elementary School
- Harding High School
- Multicultural Magnet School
- High Horizons Elementary School
- Stanford Avenue
- Goosetown Park
- Yale Street Garden
- Thomas Merton Center
- Washington Park
- Wood Park
- Yale Street

At Groundwork, we greatly appreciate all the volunteers who come out for the sweep. It would not be possible without you! We would like to especially thank the following for being an immense help by volunteering for the morning: Westport Unitarian Church, Ridgefield Academy, Sacred Heart University, Fairfield Prep High School, Kolbe Cathedral High School, University of Bridgeport, Conger House, and Building with Books.

A number of different companies and individuals also give continual support for the Park City Sweep. All of the different contributions truly make the event possible. A big thank you to: Lindquist Landscape Design, Wheelabrator Bridgeport, Alpine Environmental, Bridgeport Department of Public Works, Office of Neighborhood Revitalization, Bridgeport Trade and Technology Center, The Donnelly Dash, Elizabeth Prfiem, Lacey Manufacturing Company, The Center for Green Building, Oliver Nurseries, Smolen's Catering Service, and Ernest & Joan Trefz Foundation.



Dedication at Goosetown Park.



Scholarship recipient Jonneil Williams.

The Year in Review: Groundwork in 2007

The 2007 season is coming to an end for Groundwork, and we are proud to look back at all that was accomplished over the year. We have the opportunity to directly witness the positive effects our programs have on the people and the environment with which we work every day. While it is difficult to measure the number of smiles created or the healthiness of a garden, we can measure a number of more concrete accomplishments. Groundwork would not be possible without the support and contributions of countless individuals, and we think it is important to let you know what we have been up to over the past year.

At Groundwork:

- Volunteers donated over **4600** hours of time.
- Volunteers under the age of 18 came **560** times.
- We spent **4700** hours with at-risk youth.
- We completed **11** community projects.
- **41** city sites were cleaned and beautified.
- We made **750** visits to seniors.

Other Key Accomplishments:

- Groundwork completed the redesign of Goosetown Park, which was dedicated to victims lost to violence.
- \$4000 in college scholarships was awarded to two of our Green Team graduates.
- The BAT program was expanded to Groundwork Somerville.
- Green Team students worked at Weir Farm and hiked Bear Mountain on the Appalachian Trail.
- Our Folks was launched in Norwalk.
- The Park City Sweep drew over 120 volunteers in both April and October.



Fairfield Prep students volunteering at the Fall Park City Sweep.



Groundwork Receives Job-Training Awards

Groundwork was recently recognized for our efforts in job training and employment for individuals re-entering the job force. Over the past several years, Groundwork has hired and trained a number of employees in basic landscape maintenance that have gone on to find full-time employment. Our employees do all of the yard and lawn maintenance for the Our Folks program and assist with work in the office. Many of the individuals we hire are seniors and veterans. In recognition of our work with veterans, the American Legion awarded Groundwork a *Certificate of Appreciation* for "service and assistance which contributed immeasurably to the success of the Employment of Older Veterans." The Southwestern Connecticut's Regional Workforce Development Board awarded Groundwork a *Company Partner of the Year* certificate "for an outstanding commitment to our community's workforce."



Parents, students, and teachers volunteered during the Fall Park City Sweep at High Horizons Elementary School.



Students from local high schools involved in the Building with Books program worked at Washington Park for the morning.



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Winter's Coming and Leaves Are Fallin'

As the temperature drops and winter approaches, Groundwork is busy keeping up with all the falling leaves. Our landscape team rakes leaves for many of the Our Folks clients, and with so many trees in the area, it is one of our biggest jobs. Although the season started late this year, we are doing our best to keep up with the huge task.

To help with our own efforts at Groundwork, we have recruited students from Fairfield Prep High School to rake leaves after school and on the weekends. The Our Folks program has a number of clients located in Fairfield, and the students have taken on the leaves for us. We have organized five teams of students to volunteer once a week for the raking and bagging, and they have been excellent workers. The partnership between Groundwork and Fairfield Prep gives the students an opportunity to learn about community service and to work with people of different ages while also accomplishing a great amount of work for Groundwork.

