



Photo by Ronen Shalev



GOODdirt

THE NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT (NYRP) carries out founder Bette Midler's dream of a cleaner, more beautiful New York. NYRP restores, develops, and revitalizes underserved parks, community gardens, and open space in New York City.

NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT NEWSLETTER | FALL/WINTER 2004-2005

DEAR FRIEND,

I'm always amazed at the power of a new coat of paint. As you'll read in our cover story, the East Harlem residents who help care for our Los Amigos community garden have brought a fresh face to the garden's casita, a beloved structure that represents and binds their community. The casita's decoration has changed many times, reflecting the personality, spirit, and culture of its caretakers. It's a testament to the renewing power of change, and our ability to improve our city by continuing to see it in fresh, new ways.

As our city parks and gardens don fall colors, we enjoy this time of year for the refreshing change it brings. With your help, NYRP has effected significant changes in numerous corners of the city. Our new Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse is buzzing with activity as children and adults awaken to the joys of boating on the Harlem River. Across the river, NYRP field crews are completely restoring Bridge Park. This new vision for the Bronx waterfront points to an exciting future of environmental renewal and increased community access to a scenic and historic part of New York.

Among the 60 community gardens entrusted to NYRP, a number are undergoing transformations to make them safe, attractive, and fully functioning institutions in their communities. This could happen only with the commitment of community gardeners, neighborhood leadership, and the generous support of private and corporate donors. You have shared our vision, and inspired and educated us with yours. Together we are improving the city's quality of life by renewing our shared environment.

Bette Midler
Founder

“MI CASITA ES SU CASITA”

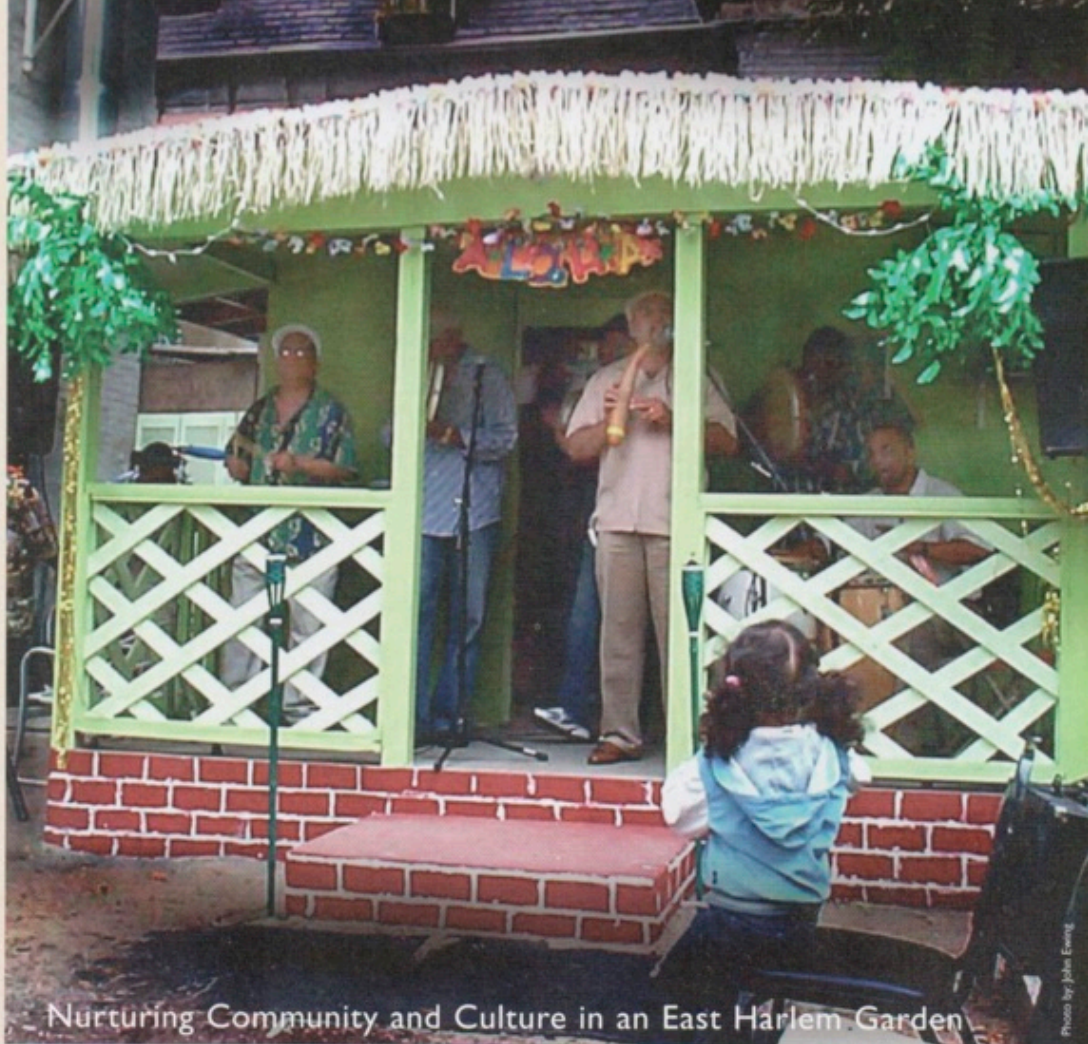


Photo by John Ewing

Nurturing Community and Culture in an East Harlem Garden

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NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT

31 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019
P 212.333.2552
F 212.333.3886
www.nyrp.org
restore@nyrp.org

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BETTE MIDLER

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN



WITH FALL COMES CHILLY WEATHER, "back to school," and the return to busy schedules. At NYRP, we are proud and excited to see so many of our efforts taking root and taking off. Much work and activity are enlivening the sites we have committed to "reclaim, restore, and revitalize."

Our work in Bridge Park in the South Bronx is dramatically transforming an underused and forgotten landscape into a safe and accessible public amenity, with breathtaking views of the Harlem River. NYRP's renewed support from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund is ensuring that work and planning for the development of the Bronx waterfront advance in a thoughtful and environmentally sound way.

Likewise, our continued work in Highbridge, Fort Tryon, and Fort Washington Parks is helping the city to steadily realize the Manhattan Greenway Project—a continuous network of bicycle and pedestrian paths encircling the borough. Cleaning, ongoing maintenance, forest restoration, and beautification projects are just a few of the services NYRP commits to these city parks.

In many of our community gardens, private and corporate donors are not only financing capital improvements, but also volunteering hundreds of hours of labor. In East Harlem and Brooklyn, several community garden restorations are currently undergoing finishing touches, as dedicated gardeners, designers, and volunteers see their combined efforts achieve beautiful and long-term benefits for surrounding neighborhoods.

Through our Environmental Education program, we are reaching more kids than ever as NYRP educators activate the crucial links between young New Yorkers and their natural environment. Our community gardens, school gardens and park sites, such as NYRP's Swindler Cove Park, provide outdoor "classrooms" that boast a wide variety of native ecosystems. These bring our Education Program to life for New York City kids.

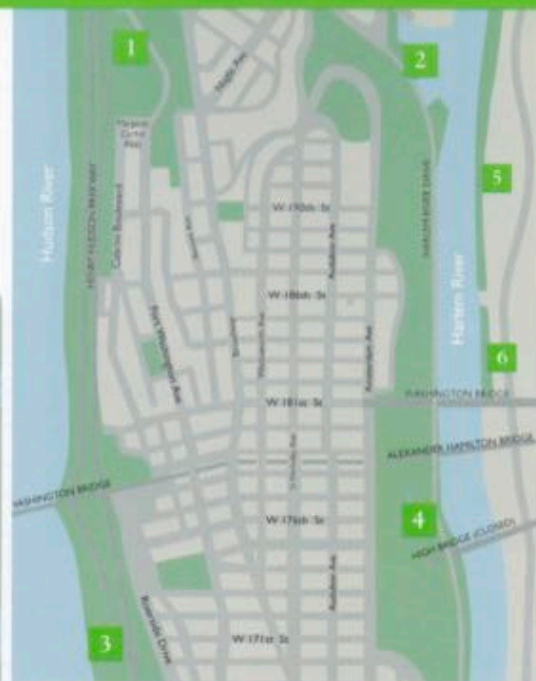
In all aspects of NYRP, now is an exciting time to enjoy the fruits of our work. Come join us!

Benjamin F. Needell, Esq.
Chairman



NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT SITES

-  PARKS
-  COMMUNITY GARDENS
-  MAJOR PROJECTS



- 1** FORT TRYON PARK
NEW LEAF CAFÉ
- 2** SWINDLER COVE PARK
RILEY-LEVIN CHILDREN'S GARDEN
PETER JAY SHARP BOATHOUSE
- 3** FORT WASHINGTON PARK
- 4** HIGHBRIDGE PARK
- 5** ROBERTO CLEMENTE STATE PARK
- 6** BRIDGE PARK

BETTE MIDLER FOUNDED the non-profit New York Restoration Project (NYRP) in 1995 to carry out her dream of a cleaner, more beautiful New York. NYRP reclaims, restores, and develops under-resourced parks, community gardens, and open space throughout New York City, primarily in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. NYRP invests in the communities it serves by providing ongoing maintenance and environmental education and recreational programs.

NYRP MAJOR PROJECTS INCLUDE:

- Swindler Cove Park
- Riley-Levin Children's Garden
- Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse
- Fort Tryon Park/New Leaf Café
- Highbridge Park
- Roberto Clemente State Park
- Bridge Park
- 22 community gardens in Brooklyn
- 16 community gardens in the Bronx
- 14 community gardens in Manhattan
- 4 community gardens in Queens
- 1 community garden in Staten Island
- Environmental Education and Recreational Programs

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TO MAJOR SITES

- 1** FORT TRYON PARK & NEW LEAF CAFÉ: Take the M4 bus to the last stop (Fort Tryon Park--The Cloisters), or take the A train to 190th Street.
- 2** SWINDLER COVE PARK (Riley-Levin Children's Garden & Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse): Take the 1 train to Dyckman Street, turn right on Dyckman and walk 1/5 mile to the intersection of 10th Ave. and the Harlem River Drive. Continue south on Harlem River Drive—Swindler Cove Park is on your left and Highbridge Park is on your right.
- 3** FORT WASHINGTON PARK: Take the 1, 9, A or C trains to 168th Street, or M4 bus to 158th Street; walk west to the park entrance.
- 4** HIGHBRIDGE PARK: For upper Highbridge Park, take the M101 bus along St. Nicholas Ave. and exit at 189th Street.
- 5 & 6** ROBERTO CLEMENTE STATE PARK AND BRIDGE PARK: In the Bronx, take the 4 train to Burnside Avenue and take the Bx40 or Bx42 bus.

Go to www.mta.info for subway and bus maps.

GROWING UP!—HORTICULTURE SCIENCE PLAYS BIGGER ROLE



Left to Right: Greg Kramer, NYRP's Horticulturist, and Dan Hunter, Deputy Horticulturist, amid newly restored native plants in Bridge Park's flowering meadow.

From its first big splash hauling trash from the banks of the Hudson River in Fort WASHINGTON Park in 1995, NYRP has steadily evolved its expertise and staff to meet the needs of northern Manhattan parks. One of the most far-reaching developments has been the professionalization of our horticulture staff. NYRP's growing expertise in science-based disciplines is allowing us to expand the way our field crews work and train—the natural “next step” after sustained cleanup is achieved. Greg Kramer, NYRP's Horticulturist since 2002, has led the effort to bring an informed and respectful approach to revitalizing these underused city parks.

“When you walk in a forest, you should feel that you are encountering the natural history of the land,” says Kramer. “Indigenous plants create that feeling, and there's no reason why we can't maintain it in city parks.”

After grappling with garbage and misuse, the biggest challenge to maintaining the health of city parks is controlling non-native species, which choke out the intricate web of indigenous and mutually beneficial flora and fauna. Like the City Parks Department's restoration project in Inwood Hill Park—where pre-Colonial era trees still stand—Kramer has spearheaded the removal of invasives and restoration of native vegetation in Highbridge and Bridge Parks. Ecology work in the Everglades

taught Kramer the long-term effects of invasives on the environment.

“The problem is as prevalent in temperate forests as in tropical forests, which we hear more about. The interdependent connections in the ecosystem are wide and deep, from soil chemistry to bird and insect migration, and one missing plant can affect five or six different species,” notes Kramer.

As an example, Norway maples are particularly destructive invasives. In Highbridge and Bridge Parks, this species of tree propagates at lightning speed, casting a deep shadow. Norway maples also monopolize resources at the root level, preventing understory trees, bushes, and ground cover from sharing the habitat. One consequence is severe soil and slope erosion, mostly from around the roots of the trees themselves.

To combat this, NYRP has initiated the removal of invasives (including bitter-sweet vine and Porcelain Berry) and the restoration of native hickories, oaks, dogwoods, and other tree species. This work is undertaken with the help of the Parks Department's twenty-year-old Natural Resources Group and the nonprofit Greenbelt Nursery in Staten Island, which supply native plant material as well as propagate species provided by Kramer. The Greenacre Foundation has also been a sustaining partner in these restoration projects. As Kramer notes, each park environment has its own strengths, peculiarities, and needs. And

some species are naturally more desirable than others.

“To the average person, the Asian elms in Swindler Cove Park look like a forest that's performing a function by being dense and green. They do to an extent. However, if the trees were oaks, the amount of native plants and animals that would benefit would be 100 times greater than what the elms offer—such as food for birds, squirrels, insects, and certain beneficial soil fungi that have a relationship with oaks.”

Therefore, the rationale for restoring native species to parks is multifold. First, they promote greater diversity of plant and animal life. Since early last summer, NYRP's planting of hackberries, viburnums, hollies, spice bush, and pipevine (Dutchman's Pipe) in Bridge Park has initiated an observable return of related butterfly species.

Making areas of parks more self-sustaining is another benefit. A thoughtful selection of natives maximizes the investment in labor and plant materials by minimizing the need for watering, weeding, and replanting because the species have adapted too old to thrive here. This strategy helps NYRP to move projects on and off the organization's roster of intensive worksites.

Horticulture education, skills training, and good communication in the field are essential to the success of these projects. As Kramer and NYRP's new Deputy Horticulturist Dan Hunter have seen firsthand, knowledge is only as useful as the hands that wield it.

“It doesn't take long to cut through a site with a pair of loppers, but that can set a restoration project back five years. Two seconds of not knowing—or not seeing—and you've lost a few young hickories, which are notoriously slow growing and have about a 40% success rate in the forest,” says Kramer. “And it may be one of those hickories that's not all that common.

Right: Volunteers planting ground cover in Bridge Park

You can't always buy everything. Some plant material doesn't grow well in containers; some doesn't propagate well from seed. You have to have respect for the process."

Hunter reiterates his much-admired boss. "Knowledge is great, but respect is almost more important in the field. Greg is always stressing to the field staff that if you aren't able to identify a type of plant material, come ask for guidance before you take it out."

In this way, NYRP field supervisors are changing the way people think and work—including community and corporate volunteers. Instruction is required for many tasks, including planting depth, root handling, and seemingly harmless activities like walking through park worksites. Failing to follow guidelines, in the short and long term, can sabotage an expensive project.

In addition to a degree in marine biology, Greg Kramer previously focused on ecology and native restoration in Florida and received a Certification in Horticulture from Long Island University. Dan Hunter has a degree in horticulture and agriculture from the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, and a diploma from Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture. The NYRP staff also has access to courses at the New York Botanical Garden, and Kramer specifies the subjects that are pertinent to NYRP work.

BUT EDUCATING THE WIDER community is also important. For example, NYRP's cleanup work in Roberto Clemente State Park—including raising the awareness of residents in River Park Towers and involving students at nearby IS 229—paved the way for park restoration in adjacent Bridge Park. Over a hundred years old and formerly buried under trash, debris, and overgrowth, Bridge Park has undergone an astonishing transformation in the few short months since NYRP began work last summer.

"Bridge Park offers an excellent opportunity to restore native flora and fauna and create an ecosystem "classroom" to educate New Yorkers about the region they live in," says Kramer. "There's pipevine and a type of butterfly you will only see on that plant—both used to be everywhere in New York. Or, paw paws—they're vital to the life cycle of insects and produce a fruit that's more nutritious than an apple. There's a clear education potential in native restoration."

Kramer's long-range goals include creating an aesthetically pleasing park that is widely accessible to visitors. Already, his team has cleared much of the invasive overgrowth, planted a flowering meadow, and defined a naturally occurring path through the shoreline park that makes the most of its sweeping views of the Harlem River, Highbridge and Swindler Cove Parks on the opposite shore. Kramer is strategizing ways to share what NYRP is learning through its work in Bridge Park with the many greening and restoration groups in the city, Long Island, and the Northeast corridor.

"It's important to explain to people why we're doing what we're doing," says Kramer. "Once they have an understanding of what's going on in these sites, and in the environment around them, they can appreciate and have more respect for it." Likewise, Kramer is learning how his own organization can develop in the future.

According to Amy T. Gavaris, Acting Executive Director, "It's really important for NYRP to ask certain questions before starting in a site. What is the environmental potential? What is the education potential? What is the community potential? How do these factors interact? How can we share information to maximize what we're bringing to—and learning from—these project sites? Needless to say, it's an exciting time to be a part of NYRP." 🍌



Photo by Adam Chazan

\$350,000 EPF GRANT FOR BRIDGE PARK & BRONX WATERFRONT

The glory days of the Harlem River may still be before her, thanks to a generous grant from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund. On June 17, Governor George E. Pataki announced the \$350,000 award to NYRP at the unveiling celebration for the new Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse. "The grant will assist the rehabilitation of Bridge Park, the 3.4 acre 'jewel in the rough' across the river from Swindler Cove Park at the eastern base of the Washington and Alexander Hamilton Bridges," states Amy T. Gavaris, NYRP's Acting Executive Director. "We are very grateful for the Governor's continued support of NYRP's activities."

"New York Restoration Project has been a tremendous partner in the State's efforts to protect open space and expand recreational opportunities and waterfront access in the New York metropolitan region," said Governor Pataki. "This grant will help create a beautiful new waterfront park along the Harlem River that will be enjoyed by future generations of children and families and further enrich the quality of life in the South Bronx and surrounding community." Since 1995, State Parks has invested \$5.1 million in 26 park and preservation projects in the Bronx.

COMMUNITY GARDENS



Photo by Diana Pizarro

“MI CASITA ES SU CASITA”

East Harlem residents enjoy a game of dominoes at NYRP's Los Amigos community garden, located at 326 Pleasant Avenue, East Harlem.

IN SEPTEMBER 5, East Harlem residents and visitors gathered at NYRP's Los Amigos community garden to celebrate the refurbished *casita*, a small houselike structure located at the back of the lot. At first glance, the tiny shed seems almost too small to be functional. That's by design; the *casita*'s main function is symbolic—a cherished token representing home, closeness, and the endurance of community ties.

From all the merriment, delicious food, and lively conga music, it was clear that the beloved *casita* is a token with a great deal of magic. Martha Alfred, a native Puerto Rican living in the South Bronx, comes to the garden every weekend to visit with friends around the *casita*—today, her daughter and two granddaughters joined her from Westchester. From even farther away, former neighbor Chico Moya traveled from Florida to enjoy the *casita* rededication festivities. He's greeted for-

mally as a respected elder by all who pass.

The term *casita* is a variation on *casa*, with the Spanish diminutive that always signals an endearment. Elena Martínez, a folklorist with City Lore, has studied this very specific form of Puerto Rican architecture, which has been transplanted to many community gardens in the city. According to her research, “There are an estimated 500 *casitas*, or *casitas de madera*, in New York City, most of them in Manhattan's Lower East Side and East Harlem, and in the southern neighborhoods of the Bronx. The *casita* is based on vernacular housing from Puerto Rico's countryside, itself a “descendant” of the *bohío*—a timber and thatched structure used by the Taínos, the indigenous inhabitants of the island.”

Ms. Martínez further reports that “*Casitas* also refer to shanty houses constructed in the 1920s and 1930s in rural regions of Puerto Rico when many were forced off their lands by large sugar compa-

nies following the 1898 takeover of the island by the United States. The houses tended to be constructed of scrap material and were easily put up and taken down, if necessary. This history is reflected in the *casitas* that dot vacant lots throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. They are not funded by any organization or institution, but consist of whatever materials community members can find or afford. Their transitory nature is echoed in the often ephemeral quality of the city's community gardens.”

“Community gardens have always played a symbolic, even political role in New York City,” says Ms. Martínez. “In a sense, it's a rebellious act to build a *casita* in a public space, even if the garden supporters are not saying anything political. Just being here, creating this space and beautifying it, transforms this community in a powerful way.”

Right, Top to Bottom: Belén Mendez, Los Amigos Garden Manager, clearing a garden patch. Ms. Mendez in front of casita at Easter. At September 5th celebration, Felipe Rangel demonstrating how to make vejigante masks, a Puerto Rican Carnival tradition.

Front Cover: Plenoluna performing plena music, a popular style of Puerto Rican folk music that chronicles the daily lives of people in the community.

And the community is again in transition. Abutting FDR Drive, the neighborhood sits adjacent to a former Washburn Wire Factory, vacant for over twenty years and earmarked since 1999 for redevelopment as a shopping center.

THE AREA ITSELF is much older. James Greer owns a 1830s Federal-style row house around the corner on 118th Street, which he has restored over the past twenty years. As a boy growing up nearby, Mr. Greer attended Benjamin Franklin High School down the street (also alma mater of the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan). He says that renovations and rising rents are squeezing the traditional population—mostly African-American, and later, Puerto Rican—out of the neighborhood. Los Amigos has provided an element of continuity, along with garden patches for tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. “But no cards!” says Mr. Greer. “This is a clean garden.”

Funded by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) Folk Arts Program, Ms. Martínez’s collaborative project with NYRP has included organizing a Los Amigos celebration featuring Puerto Rican folk crafts, conducting interviews with neighbors, and preparing an essay documenting her research and findings. (See www.nyrp.org for Elena Martínez’s essay *Los Amigos Garden and Casita: Mi casa es su casa* in its entirety.) As a folklorist, Ms. Martínez contributes to City Lore’s wide-ranging efforts to preserve and present grassroots cultural expressions in New York City—from ethnic folk arts, to subway conductor stories, to community gardens. (For more information about City Lore, visit www.citylore.org.)

As Ms. Martínez reports, “East Harlem, or *El Barrio* as many of the residents call it, has about twenty gardens between 103rd and 120th Streets, many of which have been there for more than twenty years...[making] up close to 75% of the green space in that neighborhood.” NYRP owns ten of these. A steady plan of capital improvements is making a number of these

gardens more useful and welcoming...in the meantime, NYRP provides community garden managers with supplies, labor, programming and organizational support.

Belén Mendez has watched over Los Amigos for years. Feisty and matter-of-fact, she simplifies her role in one flat statement, “I keep this place CLEAN!” Her neighbors know that she does much more and that Belén has been a part of the history of Los Amigos from the beginning. A native of Santurce, Puerto Rico, Ms. Mendez settled in El Barrio in the 1950s. Her cousin John Mendez founded the garden in 1982 and built the casita with other men from the neighborhood.

After John’s death in 2002, Belén took over managing the garden. A plaque documenting the garden’s history will be mounted on the fence. As Ms. Martínez notes, “Belén is quite active in neighborhood issues and is treasurer for her Tenant’s Association. As manager of the garden she attends Green Thumb and NYRP meetings, joins in demonstrations, does administrative work, cooks food for the gatherings, and is a liaison to organizations.”

Closer to her neighbors’ hearts (and stomachs—her *arroz con gandules*, or rice and pigeon peas, is to die for), Belén ensures that Los Amigos is a safe and welcoming place. Living across the street, she’s in the garden every day, working, visiting with neighbors, or decorating the casita for holidays. The neighborhood kids call it their “clubhouse,” and it is in fact filled with toys, books, and musical instruments for them to enjoy. The recent refurbishment included adding a covered front porch and painting the structure a friendly, pastel green. Local children were entrusted with painting trompe l’oeil bricks around the base.

“They’re a little...,” Belén says, making a wavy motion with her hand and arching her brow. “But the kids had a great time. Somebody wanted to paint over the bricks, but I said I think I like it like that...because it’s original.” With a few words and an inimitable style, Ms. Mendez has summed up the importance of folk culture perfectly. 🍃



Photo by Jason Stevens



Photo by Elena Martinez



Photo by John Ewing



The celebration and documentation of the Los Amigos Community Garden was made possible through a grant from the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

THE RODALE PLEASANT PARK COMMUNITY GARDEN—an NYRP site located near Pleasant Avenue, between East 114 and 115 Streets—has always been an active neighborhood plot. Now, special “green design” features made possible by a generous grant from Rodale, will make the East Harlem oasis an even lusher, more attractive, and environmentally friendly spot.

According to Brian Sahd, Ph.D, NYRP’s Vice-President, Community Development, “The reconstruction of the garden was undertaken to help busy gardeners who already produce a steady yield of vegetables and herbs. NYRP has installed cedar gardening beds, a rainwater collection system, and a composting toilet. An electricity-generating windmill is scheduled to be installed in the spring.” Also, Construction Chief Albin Thomas has constructed a garden shed featuring stucco-covered hay bales at its base. The sturdy, environmentally sound structure is

INNOVATIVE GREEN DESIGN ENHANCES RODALE PLEASANT PARK COMMUNITY GARDEN



topped by a “green roof” to be planted with sedum and grasses. Thomas has further beautified the garden with a pergola and grape arbor.

These new features and the lovely garden plan were provided by landscape designer Billie Cohen. Currently undergoing restoration, Pleasant Park was generously endowed last year by Rodale, which was attracted to the conscientious

work and organic practices of NYRP staff and the dedicated gardeners from the surrounding neighborhood. In June, about 35 of these Pleasant Park community gardeners and NYRP staff attended a fieldtrip to the Rodale Institute in Pennsylvania where they toured the company’s learning and test gardens. 🌱

Above: Visitors take a summer tour of the lush Rodale Pleasant Park community garden.

103RD STREET GARDEN GETS AN EARFUL!

Between June and August, 184 Disney VolunTEARS and 214 East Harlem community volunteers transformed a large, trash-filled lot on East 103rd Street into a green, multipurpose paradise (with a neighborhood party or two thrown in for good measure).

Over the course of 11 workdays totaling about 30 hours, these dedicated crews completed numerous projects across the garden’s 15,000 sq. feet—including clearing debris and fence painting, creating and mulching garden beds, hauling dirt and laying sod, and planting trees and shrubs. These projects implemented a garden plan by landscape designer Billie Cohen that includes a flower garden and pergola, playground, and basketball court. This garden design resulted from lively, open-community discussions with surrounding neighborhood groups and community leaders. One of these is Councilmember Philip Reed,

who made a \$150,000 gift toward the garden restoration. “My office and I have been working diligently with residents of East 103rd Street to make this project a reality,” says Councilmember Reed. Another diligent community organizer, Manny Rodriguez, was inspiration as a boy for part of the 20-year-old mural bordering the garden. These community ties encouraged Disney to commit a \$100,000 grant and elbow grease. “The 103rd Street Garden offered VolunTEARS with lunchtime, evening and weekend opportunities, and we’ve been delighted to be a part of it all,” says Bernadette P. Longford, Disney Manager of Corporate Giving. “The project was an excellent match with the goals of our volunteer program.” 🌱

Top Left: Bette Midler with Michael Eisner, Disney CEO; Bernadette Longford, Disney Corporate Giving Manager; East Harlem community organizer Manny Rodriguez; and Disney VolunTEARS.

Bottom Left: NYRP Founder Bette Midler and Michael Eisner in the 103rd Street community garden.

NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT



Photo by Adam Chazan



Photo by Adam Chazan



Linda Allard and Herbert Gallen

Photo by Mia Matheson

DESIGNER BRINGS NEW LIFE AND LOOK TO 111th STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN

Acclaimed fashion designer Linda Allard with husband Herbert Gallen have stepped forward with a \$250,000 gift to fund the restoration and endowment of the East 111th Street community garden—she will also provide an original garden design for the plot.

“It was the sycamore tree that really grabbed me,” says Allard, referring to the large, mature tree at the back of the lot—a rare amenity in most urban gardens. After touring a number of NYRP sites with Bette Midler this summer, Allard was convinced by the vision and work of NYRP to deepen her commitment.

“Bette’s enthusiasm for park and garden restoration is tremendously inspiring. But even more inspiring is seeing the incredible difference these gardens make in their communities. It’s a wonderful thing.”

Allard is already buzzing with ideas for the garden design, including making the most of sun and shade opportunities provided by the beautiful sycamore. She is also considering including an arbor and water feature. At this early stage, Allard anticipates planting fruit trees and garden beds for vegetables, flowers, and herbs.

“I’ve loved gardening forever,” says Allard, who over the past decade has created an extensive personal garden in Connecticut that includes orchards and woodland trails.

NYRP LAUNCHES NEW ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CURRICULA

AS OUR PARKS AND GARDEN PROJECTS evolve from clean-up sites to flourishing ecosystems, they become ideal learning resources for city kids. To make the most of these “green classrooms,” the NYRP Environmental Education program—with generous funding from The Louis Calder Foundation—has developed new outdoor curricula for the 2004/2005 school year. Approximately 1,200 northern Manhattan and Bronx at-risk youth in grades 3-8 are participating in the year-round program. Partner schools currently include PS 5, IS 218, MS 234, IS 229, and Muscota New School, and our waiting list for new school partners is growing.

Parks Science, Garden Science, and Aquatic Science are the organizing themes for the new curricula, which include age-based lessons and worksheets, parks activities such as hikes and specimen collection, and follow-up materials and activities like journaling. All lessons and materials are designed to complement New York City and State education standards. The topics covered range from identifying trees, soil composition and composting, water quality and environmental issues, bird biology and behavior, NYC mammals, to types of wetland habitats and local geology. Teaching is interdisciplinary so that math, science, literacy, art, and physical activities are all engaged in the learning process.

“Our approach is holistic,” says Philip Coffin, NYRP’s Education Director. “Students have a variety of learning styles, and they learn through their senses. Our goal is to educate the whole student and the whole spectrum of students. Environmental education provides wonderful opportunities to do this.”

Outdoor activities are the centerpiece of the curricula, making the most of biodiverse sites like Swindler Cove Park. Here, groups of students are able to study distinct habitats including a salt marsh, forest, and freshwater pond. Students also cultivate flowers and vegetables in the Riley-Levin Children’s Garden and NYRP-built school gardens, while studying plant biology and ecology.

Under Coffin’s leadership, NYRP educators meet each class every other week for the entire school year and throughout the summer, building a strong relationship with students and school faculty and a continuous environmental curriculum. The mission of NYRP’s Environmental Education department—with in-school and after-school programs—is to inspire city kids to love, learn, and feel responsible for their local environment. 🌿

Philip Coffin, NYRP’s Education Director, instructs student gardeners in the Riley-Levin Children’s Garden.



Photo by Jan Sanchez



Danaus plexippus mating in Bridge Park.

Photo by Adam Chazan



Photo by Jeff Weber



Photo by Tom Curry



Photo by John F...

Butterfly Species Sighted in Bridge Park

1. *Battus philenor* (Pipevine Swallowtail)
2. *Papilio polyxenes* (Black Swallowtail)
3. *Papilio glaucus* (Eastern Tiger Swallowtail)
4. *Papilio trailus* (Spicebush Swallowtail)
5. *Papilio cresphontes* (Giant Swallowtail)
6. *Pantia protodice* (Checkered White)
7. *Junonia coenia* (Common Buckeye)
8. *Limenitis arthemis* (White Admiral)
9. *Epargyreus clarus* (Silver-Spotted Skipper)
10. *Pieris rapae* (Cabbage White)
11. *Vanessa atalanta* (Red Admiral)
12. *Polygonia interrogatilis* (Question Mark)
13. *Danaus plexippus* (Monarch)

A Bridge Park buffet (for butterflies, that is).

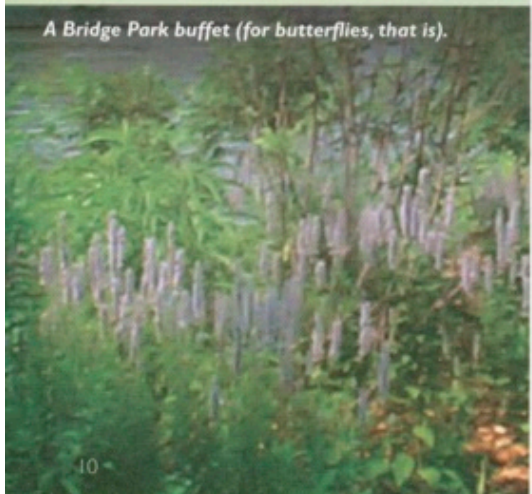


Photo by Adam Chazan

Now that the Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse is safely moored off Swindler Cove Park, the one-of-a-kind structure is drawing the attention of its northern Manhattan neighbors. When Tom Curry spied a group of kids using the boathouse for rock-throwing practice, the New York Rowing Association Executive Director seized the opportunity to recruit the very first Peter Jay Sharp Boat Club.

“Hey, this is your boathouse,” Curry informed the kids. “Come over and enjoy it.” The kids—mostly residents of nearby Dyckman Houses—spread the word, and Curry began the 2004/2005 rowing season with a class of twenty-four youth, ages 11-16. The class practices in racing shells in the afternoon on the Harlem River, 3-5 days a week. To participate, students must pass a swimming test—those needing more instruction receive free swimming lessons across the river at the Roberto Clemente State Park pool.

NYRP conducts numerous boating programs, including boat-building, and canoing, throughout the year in partnership with Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, Liberty Partnerships, and Bronx River Alliance. As NYRP’s rowing partner based at the Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse, NYRA will conduct classes and events for all ages. Thirteen youth participated in the Navy Day Regatta in Philadelphia on October 16, and other racing events are in the works. There are also Masters training and racing opportunities for skilled adult rowers, as well as “learn-to-row” classes for all New Yorkers. See www.nyrowing.org for class schedules and membership information. 🍀

Pictured above:

Top: Student in NYRP’s boat-building and rowing program tries out new nutshell pram.

Bottom Left: Students in NYRA’s rowing program at NYRP’s Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse rowing on the Harlem River.

Bottom Right: Local youth ready to launch a nutshell pram they built themselves through NYRP’s boat-building program.



New Leaf Café Chef James Bellicchi

IF YOU PLANT IT, THEY WILL COME



Photo by Ellen Robinson

At left: NYRP intern Kevin Cox places an insect pan trap in a shrub at El Sitio Feliz Community Garden, East Harlem, located on East 104th St. (between 2nd and 3rd Avenues).

ASTERS AND GOLDENROD MAY BE passing fancies to the average biped, but to pollinators such as bumblebees and butterflies, these flora are like digital billboards in Times Square—powerful enough to entice insect species into areas of the city where they're rarely observed.

Since June, Kevin Cox—a Fordham University Ph.D. candidate in Ecology and NYRP intern—has been planting such “billboards” in our community gardens in Harlem and the Bronx and observing their impact on garden biodiversity. For example, *Asclepias tuberosa* (butterfly weed)—a native New York plant that has all but disappeared from the urban environment—has attracted the Great Spangled Fritillary (*Speyeria cybele*), a beautiful black, amber, and white-speckled butterfly. Other butterflies like the Pearl Crescent (*Phyciodes tharos*), not to mention about fifteen bird species including warblers and hummingbirds, have also been observed.

Several times a week, under the direction of Brian Sahd, NYRP's Vice-President, Community Development, Cox visits twenty community gardens in a single day, spending about fifteen minutes in each collecting

specimens from insect traps and noting the size and variety of populations. The rest of his time is spent identifying insects and building a database. He says that the presence of a wide range of species indicates a healthy ecosystem and that community gardens—or “urban habitat remnants”—can play an important role in improving the environmental health of New York City.

“Kevin's work in our parks and gardens will allow us to evaluate our efforts of creating a healthy urban ecosystem” states Sahd. “These beneficial species encounter formidable obstacles as they navigate all the concrete,” says Cox. “Community gardens are island oases, and it will be very interesting to see how long it takes insects and birds to find these sites—moths, for instance, have a great sense of smell.”

The budding ecologist also notes that New York City is capable of supporting greater biodiversity, which would aid migratory birds and insects that need specific plant varieties to feed and reproduce. NYRP's restoration of city parks and gardens places the organization in a key position to encourage and document the return of greater biodiversity—a chief benefit of an informed “greening” of New York City. Generous support for this project has been provided by the Brownstone Family Foundation. 🌱

Bottom photos: Northern Manhattan seniors enjoy container gardening at the Riley-Levin Children's Garden in Swindler Cove Park. Special thanks to The Hasbro Children's Foundation for their support.



LIKE MOTHER, LIKE SON

Growing up in his mother's East 6th Street macrobiotic restaurant, Samsara, James Bellicchi was making salad dressings at nine and soon hearing cries of “Get away from that stove!” from his sports-loving father. Lucky for New Yorkers, the warnings didn't stick. Bellicchi had his first restaurant job at age thirteen and studied with a Japanese master knifeman at sixteen. He graduated from the Northeast Culinary Institute in 1997, and after a quick-rising stint at Gramercy Tavern joined New Leaf Café as Chef in 2003.

Kathleen Bellicchi hasn't been resting on her laurels, either. Nurturing a long-held dream, James' mother is bringing her culinary passion and expertise to TV audiences with a new cooking show entitled *How do you make this, Mom?* The show was inspired by countless phone calls Ms. Bellicchi received over the years from her own and other mothers' college-age children craving the comfort food favorites she's widely known for.

The show's premise is part reality TV, part sitcom, as Kathleen and James tag-team a meal for a guest family, prepared and served in the family's own home. Flour and fireworks fly as mother and son adlib and square off. According to James, “Mother taught me everything she knows; now I'm teaching her everything I know.” Off-screen, their mutual passion for food is further enhanced when Kathleen occasionally joins her son in the New Leaf Café kitchen.

With guidance from Tim Smith, a family member and senior writer at The Food Network, the mother and son duo were introduced to Betelgeuse Productions and taped the show's pilot episode in August. The production company is shopping the program among various networks and premiered the pilot at New Leaf Café on September 20th. Stay tuned!



Left to right: Children enjoying a water quality testing lesson at NYRP's Harlem River Festival; Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward with Bette Midler and NYRP staff at the Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse; Yoga for seniors at the Riley-Levin Children's Garden.

9/11 LIVING MEMORIALS EVENT

On September 10, family and community members gathered at Highbridge Park to quietly remember victims of September 11, 2001, and the November 2001 crash of American Airlines Flight 587. Last fall NYRP, through a grant from the USDA Forest Service Living Memorials program, partnered with Washington Heights community organizations to plant 13 Sargent cherry trees at four sites along Edgemcombe Avenue.

This year, participants planted daffodil bulbs and liriopie at these sites. Deputy Inspector James Wilcox (Police Precinct 33), Council President Michael Mowatt, Wynn Miriam Mehia from Alianza Dominicana, and Community Board 12 Secretary Elizabeth Lorris Ritter spoke.

CELEBRATING NATIONAL ESTUARIES DAY

On October 2, NYRP hosted the Harlem River Festival at Swindler Cove Park. Supported by the New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program and the American Express Foundation, the festival drew 300 participants for nature walks, oyster gardening, seining for fish, boat rides, and live music. At Roberto Clemente State Park across the river, the Urban Divers presented "Live from the Bottom of the Estuary," broadcast from a camera at the bottom of the Harlem River.

A VISIT FROM NEWMAN'S OWN

In August, Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward joined NYRP Founder Bette Midler for a tour of several of NYRP's major worksites, including the Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden and the Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse. The Oscar®-winning couple's philanthropic enterprise Newman's Own® is a longtime supporter of NYRP and recently donated an 8-oar rowing shell to the rowing program. Newman's Own® has given over \$150 million to thousands of charities since 1982.

YOGA & GARDENING WITH SENIORS

From early July to mid-August, NYRP conducted a yoga and gardening program for Washington Heights and Inwood seniors from Elderserve, a senior community service program of YMHA. For two hours weekly, 6-8 seniors enjoyed stretching and gardening in the Riley-Levin Children's Garden with modified yoga techniques and raised containers. The Hasbro Children's Foundation provided support for this program.



Photo by Brigitta Lacombe

AN EVENING
WITH RUTH REICHL
TUESDAY,
NOVEMBER 16TH,
6:30 P.M.

Acclaimed food writer and *Gourmet* Editor-in-Chief Ruth Reichl speaks about her best-selling memoirs *Tender at the Bone* and *Comfort Me with Apples*. The evening will be hosted by Jeanne Greenberg-Rohatyn and Nicholas Rohatyn.



Photo by Jim Trowel

HOLIDAY FLORAL
ARRANGING WITH
MICHAEL WALTER
WEDNESDAY,
DECEMBER 8TH,
6:30 P.M.

Learn how to make dried floral arrangements for the holidays with the supremely gifted designer Michael Walter at the chic gardening and antiques emporium Lexington Gardens.



Photo by Jane Jackson

On September 21, Garden Club members attended a lecture by celebrated author and *New Yorker* staff writer Adam Gopnik (pictured above with family), who spoke about the extraordinary life and work of Frederick Law Olmsted. The evening was generously hosted by NYRP Trustee Jann Wenner.

For more information about Garden Club Membership and events, please contact Jennifer Smiga at (212) 333-2552, or jsmiga@nyrp.org.

bette's BOOK CORNER

Gardens for Small Country Houses
Gertrude Jekyll and Lawrence Weaver,
260 pages, 1980, Antique Collectors' Club

First published in 1912, this beloved guide to garden design was a collaboration between two leading lights in the field. Jekyll and Weaver were both contributors to *Country Life* magazine in the early-twentieth century, a publication that was reported to be "as welcome in the WWI trenches as food packages." Failing eyesight turned Jekyll's hands from painting and embroidery to full-time gardening.

She is best known for her revolutionary designs incorporating herbaceous borders and "color gardening." Examples of her gardens still exist across the United Kingdom, such as Hestercombe (in Somerset) and Upton Grey (in Hampshire). These have been restored, as have portions of her prized, personal garden at Munstead Wood in Surrey.