



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.

GOODdirt

NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT NEWSLETTER FALL/WINTER 2006

DEAR FRIENDS,

What a harvest! This year was a record season for green thumbs in our community gardens and kids at our Riley-Levin Children's Garden in Swindler Cove Park. When I see those garden plots overflowing with vegetables and flowers, I can't help but have even bigger dreams for what we can accomplish together.

One of the things I'm eager to do in our community garden restorations is bust out of the rectangular shape and find a way to incorporate even more cutting-edge details. We are fortunate to have the input and expertise of some wonderful designers—people like Linda Allard, Lee Weintraub, and Billie Cohen, whose work is featured in this issue of *Good Dirt*. For me, the happiest time of all is when the community gets involved, because then our mission is fulfilled—these spaces are called community gardens because they're built for the community and must have that commitment.

Becoming more engaged in cleaning and greening New York has been a growth process for us. We are now poised with our new Executive Director, Drew Becher, to focus even more closely on horticulture, environmental conservation, and developing the sites we've helped to restore. When we began over ten years ago, our work was almost all garbage removal. One of the main things we've accomplished is raising awareness so that people refuse to accept it anymore. And as NYRP grows up, we're finding better and quicker ways to achieve our vision.

Though the root of our mission—litter abatement—remains the same, the branches of NYRP's work are developing in ever more interesting ways: native plant restoration in our park sites, community development in our gardens, and education on all levels, from park ecology and boatbuilding to aquatic science and vegetable gardening. It's a harvest that keeps growing and giving, thanks to your support and participation.

Bette
Bette Midler
Founder



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NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT
 254 West 31st Street, 10th Floor
 New York, NY 10001
 P 212.333.2552
 F 212.333.3886
 www.nyrp.org

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BETTE MIDLER

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



In these first months on the job as Executive Director, I've learned just how much NYRP has accomplished. It's a solid record of change and hope in areas of the city that needed both. I'm also learning about the challenges environmental groups face in New York—some are unique to this city, other hurdles are common to all urban centers.

Coming from Chicago, where I helped develop Mayor Daley's Environmental Action Agenda as Chicago Park District Chief of Staff, I've brought ideas that I believe will improve and expand our work in parks and community gardens. First, we will be focusing more on horticulture and maintenance. It's the little things that signal to the public that there's something special going on. That's why Swindler Cove Park works so well. We've really paid attention to the details—and the details together make a great place.

I want us to take that quality out to the neighborhood gardens we build and manage—each one should be an interesting, well-maintained, and well-used space, including the sidewalks and tree pits in front of the gardens. Over the next year, we will extend the impact of our community gardens out into the neighborhood. Many function as pocket parks where there are no city parks.

Community gardens can play many different roles, which we have an opportunity to redefine and expand. Some are for growing vegetables, others are passive sitting gardens, and still others are being developed into outdoor science classrooms with local schools. Since these neighborhoods are rapidly changing, it's important that our gardens become community assets beyond the participation of one or two dedicated gardeners.

Another important lesson I learned in Chicago is that change is led by example—we have a chance to demonstrate what "greening New York" actually means. In addition to native restoration initiatives, we're looking at green roofs for our park workshop buildings and merging our environmental education programs more closely with field operations to maximize the learning potential in these projects. In the gardens, we'll use rainwater collection systems, solar panels, and other innovations to show how and why "green design" is the right thing to do—environmentally, economically, and civically. We're also gradually converting to biodiesel vehicles for our field crews.

NYRP is part of a public-private coalition to determine how best to restore public access and environmental health to the Harlem River waterfront. And as our founder Bette Midler has stated, NYRP has a dream to plant one million trees in the city—we are already well into that goal and will continue by planting cherry and apple trees along the Harlem River Drive. It's an exciting time to live in New York and to work with NYRP—I want to thank our wonderful staff and Board of Trustees for their warm and generous welcome. And thank you for your continued support.

Drew Becher
 NYRP Executive Director

ON THE COVER: (clockwise) Sumac in Bridge Park; Bette Midler and Linda Allard at the opening of The Herb Garden, designed by Allard; Bette's Rose Garden on Teller Avenue in the South Bronx; and neighborhood gardener Doris Venzen and pear tree in Suffolk Street Community Garden. *Photos by Christopher Vanterpool, Brian Sahd, and John Ewing.*

GIVE WITH CONFIDENCE!
 NYRP is proud to be a member of





NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT SITES

- PARKS
- COMMUNITY GARDENS
- MAJOR PROJECTS



- 1 FORT TRYON PARK**
NEW LEAF CAFÉ
ANNE LOFTUS PLAYGROUND
- 2 SHERMAN CREEK**
- 3 SWINDLER COVE PARK**
RILEY-LEVIN CHILDREN'S GARDEN
PETER JAY SHARP BOATHOUSE
- 4 FORT WASHINGTON PARK**
- 5 HIGHBRIDGE PARK**
- 6 ROBERTO CLEMENTE STATE PARK**
- 7 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 recreation 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
- 24 community gardens in Brooklyn
- 18 community gardens in the Bronx
- 17 community gardens in Manhattan
- 4 community gardens in Queens
- 1 community garden in Staten Island
- Environmental Education and Recreation Programs

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TO MAJOR PARK SITES

- 1** Fort Tryon Park & New Leaf Café: Take M4 bus to last stop (Fort Tryon Park—The Cloisters), or take A train to 190th Street.
- 2 3 4** SHERMAN CREEK / Swindler Cove & Highbridge Parks: take 1 train to Dyckman Street, turn right on Dyckman and walk 1/5 mile to intersection of 10th Ave. and Harlem River Drive. Continue south on Harlem River Drive—Swindler Cove Park is on your left and lower Highbridge Park is on your right. For upper Highbridge Park, take M101 bus along St. Nicholas Ave. and exit around 189th Street.
- 5** Fort Washington Park: Take 1, 9, or C train to 168th Street or M4 bus to 165th Street; walk west on 165th to park.
- 6 7** Roberto Clemente State Park and Bridge Park: In the Bronx, take Bx40 or Bx42 bus.

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

HORTICULTURE – THE EXPERTISE BEHIND THE GREEN



Christopher Vanterpool

From the end of September to early May, this greenhouse at Roberto Clemente State Park in the South Bronx is where NYRP propagates native plants and tropicals, such as cannas, elephant ear, jasmine, and oleander. Soon, we will also begin using a greenhouse facility at Riverbank State Park on the Hudson River in northern Manhattan. NYRP Horticulturist Greg Kramer has also established a plant exchange with the Gateway Greenhouse Education Center at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, also undergoing native restoration and part of the National Park Service's Gateway Recreation Area.

Knowing the difference between an annual and a perennial, or native and invasive plant, may not be a high priority for the average New Yorker. But in our work, knowledge of horticulture determines whether a project succeeds—or merely survives.

While all of NYRP's park projects begin with litter cleanup, the next step in each worksite requires understanding Mother Nature, and even cleaning up after her. For example, where invasive Norway maples, mugwort, and bittersweet vine choked the slopes of Highbridge Park north of 181st Street, we've worked in ten acres to restore a balance between trees, shrubs, and herbaceous groundcovers. We've added species like black tupelo, red maple, sassafras, American holly, and spice bush, with generous support from the Greenacre Foundation. Results don't come overnight, but they have taken root.

In Bridge Park, NYRP cleared concrete and other construction rubble from approximately four acres, then created a flowering meadow of native plants and a nature trail

along a portion of restored Harlem River waterfront. In both parks, a healthier and more self-sustaining ecosystem of plants and wildlife is regenerating, including butterflies and other pollinators.



(left) Nelsi Guzman, an AmeriCorps member from the Bronx, fills a drip irrigation bag around a young tree in Sherman Creek. Guzman saw NYRP's job listing on Idealist.org and applied for a six-month term of community service—she's also an Environmental Science major at Queens College. (right) Kenny Almont is a senior at Brandeis High School in Manhattan. At the suggestion of a teacher, Kenny worked for NYRP as a paid summer intern and plans to volunteer during the school year, for which he'll receive two science credits. He particularly enjoys the different varieties of birds at Sherman Creek.

"Birds are the primary dispersers of invasives, and their seed sources are right on the spot—we're not working in a vacuum," says NYRP Horticulturist Greg Kramer. "But once you establish a balanced native habitat, it naturally curtails invasive reproduction." Kramer says one of the biggest challenges to helping this process along is educating field staff to recognize plant species, weed carefully, and tread lightly through young restoration sites.

Our latest project is restoring ecological balance and public access to Sherman Creek—the inlet cove just north of NYRP's Swindler Cove Park. Supervised by Deputy Horticulturist Christopher Vanterpool, the project began by tackling the overgrowth that formerly walled off the Harlem River waterfront from the adjacent neighborhood. Next, heavy debris was hauled away and recycled as construction fill. Much of the lighter cleanup was accomplished last fall and winter by corporate volunteers. Vanterpool and a team of NYRP field staff, AmeriCorps, and high-school interns then began rebuilding the natural shoreline with truck loads of soil, timber cribbing, biodegradable matting, and native plants.

"Like many of our projects, we've come





NYRP volunteers working in Highbridge Park.

green a portion of Aberdeen Street in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn. While the MoMA Café 2 was closed for renovation, restaurant employees helped us install 14 new tree pits with pin oaks, redbud, flowering shrubs, and perennials.

“We’re also working more closely with our landscape architects to help them understand how important horticulture is in the community garden design process,” says Kramer. “Choosing plant materials that are appropriate, function well in the sites, are easy to maintain, and meet the specific needs of local gardeners plays a big part in the success of these open spaces.”

into a property that was allowed to go its own way, without any human intervention,” says Vanterpool. “That covered the rubble and provided some green, but what we are doing now is actually improving the site. We’re increasing plant diversity that will improve conditions for both plants and wildlife, be more aesthetically beautiful, and also be low maintenance.”

Sherman Creek and the Harlem River beyond are viewable again, and the restored slopes and overlooks are now planted with swamp rose, golden rod, Dutchman’s pipe, and native grasses that control erosion.

Shadier areas feature varieties of oaks, pines, and sweetpepper bush. The invasive trees removed from the site were chipped and used to create a pedestrian trail that leads down to a natural beach, where *Spartina* grass and fiddler crabs make their home in the mud—egrets, red-wing blackbirds, and muskrat have also been observed. Restoring the upland portion of Sherman Creek will be an ongoing collaboration with the City Parks Department to expand waterfront access even further north.

Other proposed horticulture projects include revamping the New Leaf Café in Fort Tryon Park as a destination garden, with a landscaped approach along Margaret Corbin Drive. NYRP is also in discussions with the Parks Department to assume management of Fort Washington Park—the priorities in this site include developing an alternate route for George Washington Bridge construction vehicles to protect the park’s green spaces, and native forest restoration east of the railroad tracks.

By contrast, horticulture in community gardens is about working with local residents to make NYRP gardens the showplaces they should be. To this end, we are bringing more education into the field, such as training workshops and horticulture interns. We’re also planning to extend the reach of community gardens out into the block, with sidewalk flower boxes and tree plantings. In September, we worked with the Union Square Hospitality Group to

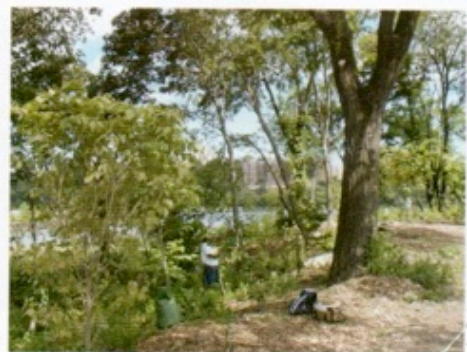


Eric Reed



Christopher Vanterpool

(above) Sherman Creek before NYRP restoration and (below) afterwards.



John Ewing



John Ewing

Washington Heights resident Helen Stefanakis, originally from Crete, gathers *Amaranthus* leaves in Highbridge Park. Recreating favorite recipes from Greece, she tosses the leaves with salad, cooks them with squash and potatoes, or simply serves them with olive oil and lemon.

THE COMMISSIONER WITH A HEART OF GREEN



Adrian Benepe, Commissioner, City of New York
Department of Parks & Recreation.

With over 28,000 acres of parkland and facilities under his care, Adrian Benepe, New York City's Commissioner of Parks & Recreation, is one of the busiest men in public service. He spoke with *Good Dirt* about the current state of city parks and the role of nonprofit organizations like NYRP.

"The city is greener than it's ever been in the modern era, but there are two major challenges facing the parks system today—the first is finding places to build new parks. With the city's population predicted to grow from 8 to 9 million over the next decade, there is greater pressure on certain parks—more people are using them and in increasingly different ways. We need to continue expanding and improving, but the reality is we're building parks where we can—not where we need to."

With the real estate market booming, Benepe says the availability of affordable land determines where the city is able to build new parks. Most—such as Hudson River Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park, and new parks along the Bronx and Harlem rivers—are sited on former industrial or underdeveloped waterfront. "Fortunately, water-

front access and recreational use is one of the highest priorities of this administration, but it believes that parks are good for economic development no matter where you build them," says Benepe.

Putting that belief in action, the city is in the biggest period of parks expansion and renovation since the massive WPA projects of the 1930s, with \$1.3 billion budgeted over the next two years. Additionally, the Greenstreets program of 2,200 planted traffic islands will be expanded by 400 in the next three years, and Operation Releaf is removing asphalt and putting down plants in inner-city playgrounds. Each year, the Parks Department plants between 7,000 and 8,000 trees.

"Our second major challenge is taking care of new parks once we build them," says Benepe. The Commissioner's number one priority is increasing skilled staff among field employees, many of whom are temporary workers hired through the City's "welfare-to-work" program. With support from the Mayor and City Council, Benepe has been able to establish in-house training for all Parks employees and a 9-month horticultural course at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden for gardeners, which have increased from 30 to 112 in the last few years.

"These gardeners are Pied Pipers of horticulture around the city, taking care of neighborhood parks and helping set up volunteer groups." Benepe says the concept of the "zone gardener" was developed by the nonprofit Central Park Conservancy, and he's now using it in smaller parks around the city. When asked why New York parks have improved so much in the last 30 years, the Commissioner readily credits the work and advocacy of nonprofit groups.

"Public-private partnerships have been a godsend for the city. They are bigger and more profound here than anywhere else in the world. There are over 1,000 small groups encompassing 55,000 individual volunteers. And there are about 10 major nonprofit groups that partner with the city to take care of parks and gardens, the New York Restoration Project being one of the

five largest. Each year, these groups raise about \$70 million in cash donations from the private sector to help maintain, program, and do construction in the parks."

"And community gardens are incredibly important. They play the role of parks in neighborhoods where we can't create new parks—and the days of the city holding on to abandoned lots are long gone. So what NYRP and other groups are doing is part of the overall greening infrastructure for the city. It's fair to say that there are more plants and flowers growing and blooming in New York City now than at any time in its history."



"...community gardens are incredibly important. They play the role of parks in neighborhoods where we can't create new parks"

Benepe says nonprofits—which are innovative, entrepreneurial, and often bound by fewer regulations—can move more quickly on certain projects, as well as effectively advocate at all levels of government and the corporate sector. "They're watching us and can often speak up with more freedom than we can about budget cuts and policies. With all of these individual volunteers and groups, the parks now have a huge, energized constituency." 🌱

THE HARLEM RIVER...LOST AND FOUND

The Harlem River is right in our own backyard, yet most of us know little about it and have probably never visited. Currently, NYRP and other nonprofit groups are partnering with the City, State, and Federal governments to restore access to this forgotten river—it's the "spine" that connects NYRP's park sites and restoration projects in northern Manhattan and the South Bronx. Here are a few surprising facts.



IT'S NOT A RIVER!

The Harlem River is an estuarine strait that connects the Hudson River to Long Island Sound and the East River—it flows in both directions with the tide. Estuaries are distinct "transition zones" between fresh and salt water. According to the EPA, "Estuarine environments are among the most productive on earth," including marshes, beaches, mud flats, rocky shores, oyster beds, and tidal pools...the Harlem River features aspects of all these. Estuaries support abundant wildlife—shore and sea birds, fish, crabs, mammals, clams and other shellfish, and turtles have all been observed along the Harlem River. Estuarine wetlands also prevent erosion and naturally filter environmental pollutants, improving water quality.



MANHATTAN'S "FACE LIFT"

Known as "Muscoota" to the Manhattan Indians, the eight-mile-long Harlem River was dredged in 1895 and joined to the Hudson River via the Harlem River Ship Canal—this Army Corps of Engineers project not only expanded commercial shipping in the city, it reshaped the northern tip of Manhattan, separating it from the Bronx. It also marked the end of pleasure boating and fishing on the Harlem River. In time, heavy industry, railroads and waterfront freeways, and the aggressive eviction of community boathouses by controversial city planner Robert Moses in the 1930s effectively severed public access to the Harlem River.



BRIDGES TO HISTORY

The Harlem River is spanned by 14 bridges, each with a different story to tell. In 1813, Robert Macomb built a dam/toll bridge near what is now 155th Street, turning the upper Harlem River into his own private pond.irate neighbors tore down the structure twenty-five years later, but the subsequent bridge erected on the spot in 1895 still bears his name. The picturesque High Bridge, completed in 1848 and the city's oldest standing bridge, carries the now

defunct Croton Aqueduct, which supplied the city with fresh water until 1958. The High Bridge Coalition, including NYRP, is working to reopen this scenic viaduct to pedestrians. Some bridges rise, others swing, but nowadays, all are opened more often for maintenance than for river traffic.

OF WHITEHALLS AND SPEEDWAYS

Boat racing was all the rage on the Harlem River from the mid-1800s into the 20th century, especially in Sherman Creek, an inlet cove and now major NYRP restoration site (see map on pg. 3). Once dotted



with boathouses, this area was known as "Sculler's Row." A favorite type of racing boat was the Whitehall, so-named for the downtown street and then-epicenter of the ferryman trade between the boroughs. (School kids in NYRP's boatbuilding program recreate and row these historic boats.) Further south, the Harlem River Speedway was a popular destination for watching carriage races and regattas from the scenic esplanade—this was all but replaced in 1922 by the Harlem River Drive, designed for automobiles. The Manhattan Greenway and NYRP's Swindler Cove Park and Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse are restoring Harlem River access to a new generation of bicyclists and boaters. 🍃

SOURCES:

Manhattan Shores: An Expedition Around the Island's Edge by Laura Rosen (Thames and Hudson, 1998).

"Rowing in New York – A History" by Katherine McCormick (New York University, <http://www.nyu.edu/athletics/clubs/crew/nychistory.html>).

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Estuary Program (<http://www.epa.gov/nep/about.htm>).

IN THE GARDENS: HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Here are a few of our community gardens and the local residents who help them thrive.



Michael Lanza picking basil at the Family Garden to use at nearby Rao's Restaurant.

Family Garden, 431 East 114th Street, East Harlem – Michael Lanza, a cook at the 110-year-old Rao's Restaurant down the street, makes good use of the abundant basil in this beautiful sitting garden (restored in 2003 with a grant from The Tiffany & Co. Foundation and planned by Tiffany Design Director John Loring). Next-door neighbors Anna and daughter Rosie open and close the garden each day and keep a watchful eye—the garden is enjoyed by local residents and teachers at lunchtime. “It’s shady in

there and people come in during the hot day to cool off,” says Anna, who emigrated with her husband and four children from Germany through Ellis Island in 1947 and has lived next door for 59 years.

Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden, 437-39 East 114th Street, East Harlem – The Campos family, originally from Guerrero, Mexico, are avid gardeners at Pleasant Park (restored with a grant from Rodale Inc. in 2003). The large, bustling garden features 18 vegetable beds with tomatoes, melons, tomatillos, and Mexican herbs such as epazote and papalo. Below is one of Alba Campos's favorite recipes for enchiladas—a special *plato* made from “whatever’s handy” (see www.nyrp.org/nygt_pleasant.htm for more recipes from Little Sisters of the Assumption, Family Health Service Inc.'s Community Garden Group at Rodale Pleasant Park).



The Campos family are avid gardeners and enjoy working at NYRP's Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden.



Reyes and Pastora Torres and family in the beautiful Shaw Block Association Garden.

Shaw Block Association, 88 Williams Street, East New York, Brooklyn – Reyes and Pastora Torres have lived on this block for over 30 years, raising 3 kids and now 7 grandkids. Emigrating with his parents from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, in the late 1940s, Mr. Torres returns to the island as often as he can, sometimes bringing back seeds and plant clippings to propagate in the garden (which features many flower varieties like hibiscus and hollyhocks, cherry, apple, and plum trees, eggplant and other vegetables, a bountiful grape arbor, strawberries, yucca, and even garlic and herbs). His gardening secret: “To get the right results from plants, you’ve got to put yourself in their spot—they can’t tell you, so you’ve got to look at them and sense what they need.”

Enchiladas (for 20 enchiladas)

- 20 corn tortillas
 - green or red sauce
 - filling: chicken (2-3 breasts boiled until tender, then shredded) or cheese rayado (shredded)
 - 1 head of iceberg lettuce shredded
 - Cheese polvo (powdered, from Mexican grocery)
- Optional: • 1 bunch radishes
• 1 avocado

Prepare salsa and set aside. If using chicken filling, cook, shred and set aside. (Note: you can use the broth from the chicken in your salsa, if desired.) Heat tortillas in a frying pan or on grill. Dip hot tortilla in salsa, remove and wrap around filling (chicken or cheese) and place on a plate. Repeat. Cover enchiladas with warm sauce, powdered cheese, and shredded lettuce. Add avocado slices on top and radish cubes on side if desired.

Suffolk Street Community Garden, 174 Suffolk Street, Lower East Side – Doris Venzen (see cover photo), originally from St. Thomas, has lived on the block for 30 years and does most of the cleaning, repairs, and painting in the garden—she also loves growing tomatoes and is very proud of the plot's numerous pear trees. Clay Yuster, the garden's event coordinator, is a third-generation electrician, his family's business in the neighborhood for over 100 years. This NYRP garden was famously restored by the BBC America TV show *Ground Force* in 2002 and has since become a popular neighborhood site for barbecues, block parties, and quiet coffee breaks. ☺

COMMUNITY GARDEN RESTORATIONS – AN UPDATE



(left) Mildred T. Rhodebeck Garden in the Bronx. (right) Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein and GS volunteers help refurbish the McLeod Community Garden in Brooklyn.

In Brooklyn and the South Bronx, four NYRP community garden restorations are at different stages of completion, but all promise great things for their respective neighborhoods. In the Hunts Point section of the Bronx, the Mildred T. Rhodebeck Garden (funded by a generous grant from The Rhodebeck Charitable Trust) has a rustic look created by landscape designer Edie Kean. Hardscaping has been completed, with new vegetable beds, pathways, and a recycled-brick patio, and there's a new wooden shed and arbor. Local gardeners have been growing vegetables all summer, and NYRP is currently finishing up the fall planting of bulbs and smaller plants.

In East New York, Brooklyn, the large McLeod Community Garden is undergoing major construction. Designed by landscape architect Lee Weintraub, the plan includes eco-friendly pathways created from a poured, porous material that allows for better drainage. A grove of birch trees will be planted at the entrance to the garden. The center of the garden features a refurbished gazebo and an assortment of vegetable and decorative planting areas. The back will contain a gathering area with a built-in barbecue and food preparation spot. This garden restoration has been funded by Goldman Sachs to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the company's Community TeamWorks program and helped along by several

corporate volunteer workdays—NYRP anticipates a spring 2007 opening.

The Heckscher Foundation Children's Garden in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is designed for and with neighborhood school children and contains many wonderful "green" features selected by landscape designer Billie Cohen. So far, we've installed raised vegetable beds, which are constructed of galvanized metal and laid out in a sunburst pattern. We're currently building two arbors and an ingeniously designed wooden shed with a rammed earth wall, an American Indian construction

technique, and a porch-covered deck for an "outdoor classroom." The garden will feature a rainwater collection system, composting toilet, and solar panels.

Also in Brooklyn, the Garden of Hope, with a restoration plan by acclaimed interior designer Ellie Cullman, is scheduled to begin construction and to be completed by Memorial Day 2007. This project is in honor of the late Hedi Kravis, former partner with Ms. Cullman in the firm Cullman & Kravis, and has been made possible by generous donations by her friends and colleagues. 🍀



The Heckscher Foundation Children's Garden under construction in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

IN THE GARDENS:

SPRING PICNIC 2006 – OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL YET!



Honorary co-chair Oscar de la Renta dancing with Bette Midler.

Highbridge Park in northern Manhattan was the setting for our record-breaking 5th Annual Spring Picnic benefit on May 22, which drew over 400 guests, including Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and raised over \$760,000 for NYRP projects. NYRP Founder Bette Midler hosted a dinner served under a tent erected in the Highbridge Park swimming pool, one of 11 historic, WPA-built pools opened in the city in 1936. Students from Pierre Dulaine's Dancing Classrooms program (featured in the documentary *Mad Hot Ballroom*) performed, then led Honorary Chairs Annette and Oscar de la Renta and other guests in lively salsa and meringue dancing. Glenn Dubin and Henry Swieca, Spring Picnic co-chairs with NYRP Trustee Marcia Diamond, spoke eloquently about growing up in Washington Heights and their love for the neighborhood's historic parks. Later, with our hilarious MC, Nathan Lane, and comedienne Judy Gold, Bette led a live auction, where guests generously sponsored the planting of trees (156 saplings and 30 mature trees), 19 students in our boatbuilding program, and swimming lessons for 56 northern Manhattan kids in preparation for our rowing program. Bette capped off this special evening with a sing-along...*By the Light of the Silvery Moon!* To view photos from Spring Picnic 2006, visit www.nyrp.org.

G-UNITY FOUNDATION AND LESLIE JOHNSON FUND NEW GARDEN RESTORATIONS

In July, NYRP received a \$150,000 grant from the G-Unity Foundation, founded by rap sensation 50 Cent (Curtis Jackson), to help us develop a children's learning garden in our Baisley Park Community Garden in Jamaica, Queens. Mr. Jackson's public foundation provides grants to nonprofit organizations that focus on improving the quality of life for low-income and underserved communities. Baisley Park is located in a community with over 52,000 children and only 5% of the recommended amount of outdoor/open space, according to Community Board 12 in Queens. "We are looking forward to witnessing the transformation of Baisley Park into a useable green space for kids in the neighborhood. We are so excited to support NYRP in giving this community a garden it can be proud of," says Nina Biggar of The G-Unity Foundation.

And in September, Leslie Dae Johnson, a forensic geneticist and NYRP patron, made a \$100,000 gift to restore our Lola

Bryant Community Garden in Bushwick, Brooklyn, which has been designed by renowned landscape architect Ken Smith. This active community space is known for producing large quantities of fruits and vegetables, which are shared with area senior citizens. Dr. Johnson has also pledged an additional \$150,000 over three



LOLA BRYANT COMMUNITY GARDEN



years for the garden's endowment. "I'm very honored to work with NYRP on a project that brings the community together—it's another step in the right direction," says Dr. Johnson, also noting that the St. Francis College Women's Basketball Team is eager to participate in Phase 1 of the garden restoration in spring 2007.

IN THE GARDENS:

THE HERB GARDEN OPENS IN EAST HARLEM

On May 25, East Harlem residents, school teachers, Community Board 11 Chairman Lino Rios, and NYRP members joined Founder Bette Midler and NYRP patron Linda Allard to celebrate the opening of The Herb Garden located on East 111th Street. Designed by Allard, a renowned fashion designer, and funded by her and husband Herbert Gallen, the lovely community spot features a mature sycamore tree and circular gathering area paved with garden stones, wooden pergola, and a BBQ in the back of the garden. In the

front are beds for herbs and vegetables and beautiful decorative beds of flowering plants. "I planted The Herb Garden like I plant my own garden, with a mix of vegetables, herbs, flowers, and fruit trees," says Allard. "Designing a garden is very much like designing a collection—it's about color, texture, heights, proportion...relationships." With that goal in mind, The Herb Garden will be a welcome space for nearby schools, community groups, and East Harlem residents to share and enjoy. To view more photos of The Herb Garden, visit www.nyrp.org.



Herbert Gallen (center) and friends at The Herb Garden opening.

IN MEMORY OF ROXANNA ROSE MENNELLA

On a rainy Saturday in early summer, dozens of friends joined the family of Roxanna Rose Mennella at NYRP's Gil Hodges Community Garden in Brooklyn to dedicate a crepe myrtle tree and stone bench. Despite the weather, everyone



The Mennella Family.

made their way to the corner garden on Denton Place and Carroll Street in Park Slope on June 3 to gather for Roxanna, who passed away in 2005.

Following Roxanna's desire to have a "flowering or fruit-bearing tree" planted in her memory, her family searched for the right organization and location to have her wish fulfilled. As the family notes, after nearly a year of patient research, they finally found the perfect match—the tree planting memorial program at New York Restoration Project.

"Combining the purpose of beautifying New York City and the drive for community involvement, NYRP's community gardens are little havens of peace and comfort in our busy city," says Heather Mennella Romero, Roxanna's sister. "The boundless energy and enthusiasm of NYRP Founder Bette Midler also remind us of Roxanna's effervescent joy, magnetic character, and eternal spirit."

Future plans being discussed for the Gil Hodges Community Garden include a bird sanctuary and additional plantings—and the Mennellas and their friends are eager to volunteer in these projects. The Mennella family expressed their gratitude to the New York Restoration Project, especially Development Associate Tom Campbell, for making Roxanna's wish come true.

FIELD TRIP TO THE RODALE INSTITUTE

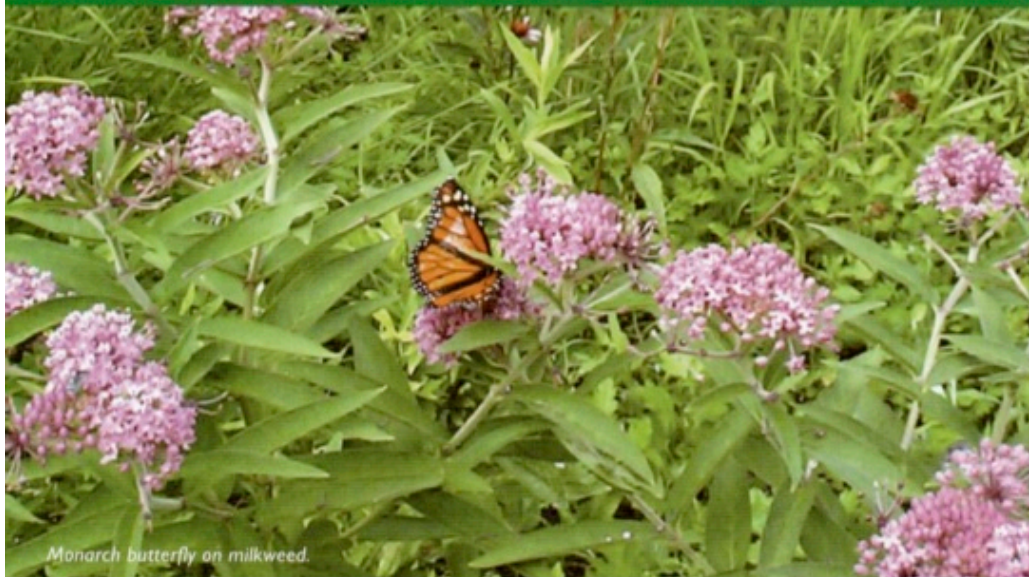
On August 30, a group of gardeners from NYRP's Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden and their children trekked to The Rodale Institute in rural Berks County, Pennsylvania, for an afternoon of horticulture and fun. This is a favorite annual event, where the gardeners can reunite with the Rodale family, whose Rodale Inc. restored and endowed this East Harlem community garden in 2003. Chairman of the Board Ardath Rodale and daughter and Vice Chairman Maria Rodale (with Maria's newborn daughter, Lucia) welcomed 15 adults and 20 kids with a picnic of hamburgers, grilled chicken, and homemade ice-cream. Afterwards, the group toured portions of the Institute's 333-acre Experimental Farm for regenerative organic agriculture and gardening, including a forest and open meadows. "It's really exciting for city kids to get out and run and play in open space—we didn't want to go home!" says Hannah Riseley-White of Little Sisters of the Assumption, Family Health Service Inc., which runs gardening programs for the community at NYRP's garden.

Ardath Rodale and visitors from Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

THE BUTTERFLY PROJECT



Monarch butterfly on milkweed.

New York's "concrete jungle" may be designed with only one animal species in mind—humans. But local ecologists and conservationists have begun to study how community gardens provide habitats for other resident wildlife...and those just passing through. For migrating butterflies, community gardens are a pit stop on the annual journey south. As such, these neighborhood plots present a unique opportunity to study the relationships between plants and wildlife in the urban landscape.

The Butterfly Project, initiated in 2003, is a loose coalition of conservation organizations (including NYRP) and individuals that add native plants to community gardens as food sources for beneficial pollinators, including butterflies, bees, and wasps. The goal is to increase the conservation education value of urban community gardens and improve their ecology, while providing a local "laboratory" for scientists.

"We've chosen native plants because many of the insects that were in New York before its intensive development have to some degree co-evolved with them," says Kevin Cox Matteson, a doctoral student in Ecology at Fordham University who has established "pollinator conservation areas" in 10 community gardens in East Harlem and the Bronx. "The insects have grown accustomed to the particular taste of these plants and know which ones they can feed

on, which isn't to say that, like all good New Yorkers, they don't try new things."

Some of these plants, like milkweed, also attract aphids, which are food for lady bugs and so on, potentially creating a more dynamic and diverse food web in each garden. As Cox notes, it's vastly more difficult to reestablish ecological interactions between plant and animal species than it is to pave a lot, which is how most community gardens first came into being. The Butterfly Project is a way to test how urban environments react to the reintroduction of native plants.

Cox admits that these species, like great lobelia and goldenrod, may not always be as aesthetically pleasing as non-native ornamentals—local gardeners are tempted to pull them up as weeds until they learn



Kevin Cox Matteson (left) has established "pollinator conservation areas" (right) in ten community gardens.

their role in feeding the insects that pollinate their vegetable beds. "Goldenrod is a phenomenal pollen producer in late summer/early fall, which bumble bees need to survive the winter," says Cox, who has observed 50 types of bees in community gardens (only a fragment of the hundreds of bee species found in New York state). These and other insects hibernate and reproduce underground. Turning the soil in the spring destroys the insect larvae, which is another challenge for conservation educators. One option Cox suggests is designating "mini meadow" garden plots, where native species are planted and left alone.

"There's also a powerful psychological effect," says Cox, who believes that along with a bodega and a fire hydrant, there should be a community garden on every block. "We get used to thinking of pigeons, rats, and roaches as the only species that can survive with us in this stressful environment. It's wonderful to see the look of delight in kids' faces when they see butterflies floating around the gardens. They think they've escaped from the Bronx Zoo—it's funny, most urban ecologists have the same view. But we're helping to change that."

The Butterfly Project coalition hosts regular meetings for local gardeners and educators at area botanical gardens and colleges—they also distribute free native plants and information about butterflies and other pollinators. To find out more, visit http://www.nyrp.org/nygt_conservation.htm. 🌱



SUMMER BOATBUILDING, GARDENING, AND MAPPING

Over the summer, NYRP conducted a variety of outdoor learning programs with numerous partners. In our third collaboration with Liberty Partnerships (a New York State Education Department-funded high-school dropout prevention program), twenty 7th and 8th grade students from all over the city enjoyed four weeks of boatbuilding, aquatic activities, and field trips. In our workshop, the kids and our Boatbuilding Educator Jeff Weber built a Nutshell Pram and christened it *Catch of the Day*, a nod to their good luck seining in the Harlem River from the banks of Swindler Cove Park. The students painted the wooden boat with images of estuarine wildlife, including blue crabs, bay anchovies, and other fish they caught, identified, and released.

The program also included rowing and wetland ecology activities, such as building watershed models from craft materials and then exploring the real thing in Swindler Cove Park. These were led by our new Aquatic Science Educator, Christine Carlson, who also took the kids birding with binoculars in Sherman Creek and led path maintenance activities in Highbridge Park. The program was capped off with field trips to Orchard Beach's Twin Island Nature Path and canoeing at Inwood Hill Park. In August, there were separate one-, two-, and three-day rowing and seining programs with high-school seniors from Hunter College's College Now Program, and with younger kids from Carol Inc. and Harbor Camp (Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance). NYRP also conducted three rowing "field walks" at Swindler Cove Park over the summer, which were open to the general public.

During much of the summer, NYRP Environmental Educator Juan Acosta led weekly gardening programs in the Riley-Levin Children's Garden at Swindler Cove Park, with the help of high-school and college interns. Forty students from P.S. 5 (next to the park) grew vegetables, including broccoli, green peppers, tomatoes, herbs (chives and mint), and flowers (marigolds and cosmos). The classes also identified insects and



Jeff Weber (left, top and bottom), Christine Carlson (right)



used environmentally friendly pest control. The kids raised bumper crops, estimating a total yield of over 150 lbs. of vegetables, which they took home and enjoyed with their families. Bryant Ramirez, a 9th-grader from George Washington High School and second-time NYRP intern, participated in our gardening and biking programs when he attended P.S. 5 and I.S. 218. "I wanted to intern with NYRP to learn more about it and work with the educators," said Bryant, who, among other duties, helped kids identify and avoid poison ivy.



Kristyn Koczur

Senior citizens from ElderServe, a Washington Heights service program of YMHA, also gardened with NYRP over the summer. Each group of about 10 seniors participated in easy-to-reach container gardening—preparing soil and growing tomatoes

and herbs while sharing memories of cooking and special recipes. "Swindler Cove Park is an Eden—the seniors go there and are just transported," says ElderServe site manager Kristyn Koczur. "Juan is so good and patient, and the seniors are rejuvenated by the sensory elements of the gardening."

Acosta also conducted a weekly mapping class in Fort Tryon Park with 6th graders from I.S. 218. After teaching map-reading basics, Juan led the kids in orienteering exercises using hand-held GPS devices and photographs to plot terrain and plant features on grid maps of the park. Some of these activities were organized as friendly competitions between the girls and the boys—guess who usually won (hint: sorry, boys!).

LOOK WHAT WE FOUND!



Stacie Krone

This baby blue jay was spotted in Swindler Cove Park in June. Blue jays can be found across most of North America, from Newfoundland to Texas. Parent jays are attentive; both Mom and Pop feed their newly hatched.



NYRP AWARDED A TWO-YEAR AMERICORPS CONTRACT

The Corporation for National and Community Service has awarded NYRP with a two-year contract totaling \$546,767, which provides for the hiring of 26 AmeriCorps members per year. Primarily college-age youth, these volunteer members are working in all areas of our mission, including the environmental education and community garden divisions, special-projects task force, and Swindler Cove, South Bronx, and northern Manhattan parks. In addition to a living stipend, AmeriCorps members who successfully complete 6- or 11-month terms of community service will earn a total of \$198,450 in Education Awards, which are funded through the National Trust and can be used for higher education tuition and other school expenses.

NYRP JOINS ONE PERCENT FOR THE PLANET CONSORTIUM

In September, NYRP joined other environmental organizations receiving support from the One Percent For the Planet consortium of businesses. Launched in 2001 by Patagonia Inc. founder Yvon Chouinard and Craig Mathews, owner of Blue Ribbon Flies, One Percent For the Planet was inspired by the principle of "environmental tithing" (10% of pre-tax profits or 1% of sales, whichever is greater), a commitment Patagonia has kept to environmental groups since 1985. Today, over 400 private-sector enterprises have joined the One Percent For the Planet ranks that pay an "earth tax" to conserve and protect the planet's natural resources. *To learn how to support NYRP and to become a member, visit their website at www.onepercentfortheplanet.org.*



"GREENEST BLOCK IN BROOKLYN" COMMENDATION

Congratulations to the Bridge Plaza Block Association. Their block on Concord Street between Duffield and Gold Streets in Brooklyn was awarded Honorable Mention in this year's "Greenest Block in Brooklyn" competition for community gardeners and businesses. The block is home to NYRP's Bridge Plaza Community Garden, which was restored last year thanks to students from Parsons School of Design and funding from the Rochlis

Family Foundation. Criteria for judging included horticulture, creativity, garden maintenance, and community participation. One Concord Street resident also won 3rd Place in the Window Box category. The competition is a project of Brooklyn GreenBridge, Brooklyn Botanic Garden's community horticulture program, and Borough President Marty Markowitz. *For more information, visit <http://www.bbg.org/edu/greenbridge/greenestblock/>.*



David Prossell

FLORAL ARRANGING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Thursday, December 7, 2006, 6:30 p.m.

Learn how to make elegant and distinctive wreaths and centerpieces for the holidays with a top floral designer at Chelsea Garden Center, Manhattan's premiere garden center and one of "New York's 100 Best Places to Shop." Garden Club members enjoy a 10% discount on all purchases at Chelsea Garden Center this evening.

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



Brian Sald

Summer beauty at Bette's Rose Garden, our community garden on Teller Avenue in the South Bronx.



An Inconvenient Truth
Al Gore
325 pages, 2006, Rodale Press

The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter
Peter Singer and Jim Mason
328 pages, 2006, Rodale Press

In this stirring appeal to both conscience and reason, former Vice President Al Gore lays out the case for why and how the world's leading economies should combat global warming. Gore backs up his cataclysmic warnings with scientific data, examples of current effects of warming from around the world, and suggestions for how to slow down and perhaps reverse the superheating of Earth's atmosphere. The personal passion of Gore's argument takes this book far beyond textbook science, revealing a great deal about the man behind the dire message.

This is a fascinating and at times frightening look at American eating habits and the mega-industries that supply them. The authors compare the grocery buying practices of American families, ranging from average middle-class households to more affluent and educated consumers. The authors also investigate current food production methods and conditions within various industries, from poultry farms to slaughterhouses. Corporate profits, animal welfare, and consumer health issues are all considered in this exploration of the ethics of consumption.