

A Greener Providence

There's no question that planting 40,000 trees across Providence and improving the landscapes of the city's struggling neighborhoods within the next decade are ambitious goals. Fortunately, Groundwork Providence is up to the task.

Established nearly 30 years ago as Keep Providence Beautiful, Groundwork Providence has evolved beyond its clean-up efforts, extending into education and training programs.

"The physical improvements we implement are always done with the intention to not only improve the parcel of land itself, but also to use the work as an opportunity to educate and provide resources for the entire community," said Sheri Lupoli, deputy director of Groundwork Providence. "In doing so, we have been able to create employment opportunities for trainees in our job development program."

One of the primary focuses of Groundwork Providence is to clean up beautify underutilized and previously polluted parcels of land. In doing so, the organization aims to reconnect the fabric of urban neighborhoods while providing space where people can grow their own food and learn about the environment.

Dubbed the Groundwork Garden, the design and construction of the space is done by at-risk adults participating in the organization's job-training program.

Having secured federal funds through the EPA Environmental Workforce Job-Training grant, Groundwork Providence conducts 12-week trainings twice a year, targeting individuals with limited career opportunities in Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket and Woonsocket. Now in its third year, the program's curriculum centers on identifying the needs of the employer community to include certifications in hazardous waste operations, construction safety, CPR/First Aid, lead and asbestos abatement, indoor air quality and underground storage tank inspection and maintenance. This is combined with 60 hours of classroom training from some of New England's leading experts on environmental science, storm water management, brownfields revitalization, tree care and horticulture, and more.

"We target chronically unemployed populations and provide job training in the fields of sustainable urban landscape and environmental workforce development - each an area that offers a wide va-

riety of career opportunities," says Lupoli. "Just as important, the garden has also been successful in improving access to suitable grow-space in the city for those who want to produce their own food."

The Groundwork Garden is a hub for the Providence Community Growers' Network, one of six sites in Providence that serve as distribution centers for gardening materials and host community

coverage by 30 percent by 2020.

To accomplish this, Groundwork Providence is working with the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program to leverage the planting of 40,000 new trees by homeowners, land-owning institutions and the city of Providence. By securing and supplying trees at minimal cost to Providence residents, the program is successfully increasing the urban tree

of Groundwork's job-training program as individuals seek permanent environmental work.

As a rapidly growing organization, Groundwork Providence is looking to grow its team of volunteers. According to Lupoli, the best way to get involved is to participate in a tree planting; events are regularly posted to their website at www.GroundworkProvidence.org. Volunteers are often needed to assist with administrative tasks.

"While there's often a lot of interest in our work around Arbor Day and Earth Day in April, we're always in need of volunteers. Our efforts, both with planting and especially around education, are year-round," says Lupoli.

Entirely funded by grants and donations, Groundwork Providence offers local businesses and individuals a variety of ways to support its work. Every donated dollar the organization receives or earns through its GroundCorp venture goes directly into its programs. Along with accepting donations by cash and check, donors have the option to make a gift online through Groundwork's website. The organization also accepts donated tools, gardening equipment, building materials and planting mediums.

"Each of us at Groundwork Providence live in the city and take immense pride in the community and our unique opportunities to initiate changes," said Lupoli. "Our hope is to continue growing as a valuable resource and build partnerships with other organizations that share our aspirations for a more beautiful capital city - it's all about creating positive change from 'the ground up.'"

For more information on Groundwork Providence, visit www.GroundworkProvidence.org or contact Sheri Lupoli at 351-6440 ext. 15.



In addition to the raised beds used by members of the community to grow a wide variety of produce and flowers, the Groundwork Garden also features a newly-installed Ecolab to host educational workshops for farmers of all levels and ages.

events. It will house the soon-to-be-completed outdoor Ecolab, which will hold educational workshops for farmers of all levels and ages.

"Our garden is one example of the many interventions we seek to implement as a way to educate and involve the community in urban revitalization," says Lupoli. "We don't specify what people should grow in their plots, but we do have guidelines for growers to follow so all can enjoy the same benefits of a healthy and productive garden."

Representing what may be Groundwork Providence's most ambitious initiative is Trees 2020. Developed in 2008 in partnership with Doug Still, Providence's City Forester, the program addresses the lack of residential tree planning in the city. Funded by the Helen Walker Raleigh Tree Care Trust Fund of the R.I. Foundation, it aims to increase Providence's tree

canopy in some of the city's most in-need neighborhoods. To date, nearly 10,000 trees have been put in the ground, and the benefits are substantial.

"With greater tree coverage, daytime temperatures in the summer decrease due to shade, air pollution is filtered, storm water overflow is reduced and winter winds are slowed, which can have a direct impact on the reduction of heating costs. Overall, these neighborhoods can experience an improved quality of life where additional tree canopy thrives," Lupoli explained.

To further support Trees 2020, Groundwork Providence recently completed its new Hope Tree Nursery, built by the organization's GroundCorp program - a social venture initiative that offers landscape design-build and maintenance services. The program provides paid, hands-on experience to graduates