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# OEC NEWSLETTER

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Official publication of the Onondaga Earth Corps

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## Happy New Year! Getting OEC's 20th Anniversary Started with Open House Events.

Onondaga Earth Corps wishes you a Happy New Year!

2023 Marks the 20th Anniversary since the founding of the organization (formerly known as the Eli MacDonald Green Team). With 20 years in the books, we look forward to refreshing our connections with the community and invite you to join us at our upcoming open house events where we can answer your questions about OEC like: Are you hiring? (In short yes) How do I get involved? When do you start your programming? Where will you be working this year? What will you be doing to celebrate your 20 years anniversary? and more!

To sign up for an open house event, email us at [info@onondagaearthcorps.org](mailto:info@onondagaearthcorps.org), call us at 315-565-3797, or register for the event online at <http://oecevents.eventbrite.com>

### **01/11 Volunteers and Potential Staff**

WHEN: 03:30 - 04:30p WHERE: SUNY EOC @ 100 New St. Syracuse, 13202

### **01/13 Partners & Organizations**

WHEN: 3:30 - 4:30p WHERE: SUNY EOC @ 100 New St. Syracuse, 13202

### **01/17 Potential Crewmembers**

WHEN: 4:00 - 5:00p WHERE: SUNY EOC @ 100 New St. Syracuse, 13202

### **01/19 Partners & Organizations (Virtual)**

WHEN: 4:00 - 5:00p WHERE: Online via Zoom  
(<http://oecevents.eventbrite.com>)

### *Important Upcoming Dates*

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#### **OEC Open House Events:**

All events will take place at 100 New St. Syracuse, NY 13206

Jan 11th at 3:30PM  
Volunteers & Staff

Jan 13th @ 3:30PM  
Partners & Orgs

Jan 17th @4:00PM  
Crewmembers

Jan 19th @4:00PM (hybrid)  
Partners & Orgs- Register Online

#### **Spring Crew Leader Application Deadline**

Jan 20th

#### **Youth Program Coordinator Application Deadline**

Jan 27th

#### **Youth Climate Summit (Green Fair)**

Feb 11th @12:00PM at the ESF Gateway Center

#### **Community Pruning Event**

SAVE THE DATE Feb 18th,  
Location TBD

*Thank you to our Sponsors*

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**Webucator**  
Allyn Foundation  
Syracuse University  
Rare Earth Nursery



# Encore 2022

## OEC & supporters celebrate youth service to community & environment

BY GREG MICHEL

Each year OEC hosts Earth Corps Encore, a gathering and celebration for our crew members and their families, staff, community partners, volunteers, sponsors, and board members. In 2022, over 130 attended at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, with special appearances from Mayor Ben Walsh, Hamilton the Goat, Egon the Owl, and Steven Muhammad - an early leader with OEC that came up from New York City to attend.



Mayor Ben Walsh makes an appearance to congratulate OEC for their many accomplishments in 2022.



A crowd gathers to meet Egon the Eurasian Eagle-owl a feathery resident at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.

The event featured a Syracuse youth music trio - Yana's Constellation, video presentations from our crew members, presentation of our annual award, The Eli MacDonald Service Award (see photos below), and acknowledgement from The Corps Network (TCN) for becoming a fully accredited conservation corps. After a year-long review of general operations, financial management, risk management, governance, and corps operations, OEC was bestowed this honor.

OEC has always taken the opportunity to connect our diverse stakeholders to celebrate our accomplishments through events like Encore.

Coming in fall of 2023, we will be hosting our largest event ever! We will be celebrating 20 years as a program. We look forward to connecting with former youth graduates, staff & board members, and community partners. We'd love to hear your ideas about how to celebrate! Send us your ideas to [info@onondagaeearthcorps.org](mailto:info@onondagaeearthcorps.org) and stay tuned for updates about Encore 2023.



Emmanuel Atari youth recipient of the Eli MacDonald Service Award (left) with Tay Stenson, OEC's Personal Development and Outreach Coordinator (right).



Saadiya Sheekh-Nuur young adult recipient of the Eli MacDonald Service Award.



# Salem Hyde Education and Planting- Arbor Day Celebration

BY KATE ABEL

A core tenet of Onondaga Earth Corps' (OEC) mission is engaging youth to understand the relationship between people and the urban ecosystem. In partnership with the Syracuse Department of Parks and Recreation, we often collaborate with community schools in outdoor learning activities and hands-on service projects to achieve these goals. This year, we connected with Salem Hyde Elementary School to host outdoor classroom sessions and a tree planting service project with fourth grade students in honor of Arbor Day.



Students, teachers, and OEC crews celebrate 33 years of being a part of Tree City USA by celebrating Arbor Day.



Fourth Grade students from Salem Hyde Elementary pose for a picture after successfully planting a ginkgo tree at the school.

In advance of our tree planting day, two OEC AmeriCorps members created tree-focused activities to prompt exploration of the benefits of trees in the urban community and ecosystem. In groups of about 15 students, we played interactive games such as Trees Save the Rain, and a tree identification walk.

On October 13th, we returned to the Elementary school campus to plant 16 trees around the playground. Students were broken up into groups of 3-4, and led by an OEC crew member to plant each tree accordingly. Small groups allowed for each fourth grade student to have a hands on tree planting experience and provided OEC crew members an opportunity to lead and showcase their skills developed over the season. Through distractions of kids on the playground, and gravelly soil quality, members and fourth graders alike persevered in getting the job done.

We received positive feedback from teachers, students, and crew members, as each was able to take valuable experience away in improving the landscape of the school campus. Ms. Macro, the science teacher who helped mobilize the student groups, shared some of the classroom impact she's seen. "They are still talking about it. They loved having an opportunity to tie what they are learning in the classroom with a real-world experience. The students will always remember the value of trees in an area and are personally invested in the well-being of the trees they planted. Whenever we are on the playground, they check to make sure the trees are doing well." Macro said. In 2023, we look forward to connecting with more schools to promote community involvement, youth participation and continuing to grow tree canopy in the City of Syracuse.



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# Free Trees From the City

BY KATE LITTLEFIELD

It has been quite some time since OEC has hosted a tree giveaway. In 2009 we distributed over 200 on the South and Near West Sides of the City. This year we are at it again in partnership with The City of Syracuse. Since it has been a while, we tested a Free Tree Giveaway program which primarily focused on distributing native trees to city residents for free along with planting and care instructions. The species provided at the giveaway ranged from small, fruit producing trees, to large shade and/or nut producing trees and even some shrub-form trees to be used for more of an ornamental purpose rather than edible fruit production. The giveaways were held during community events as an additional element to the event activities. OEC assisted in plant delivery to the event location, planting demonstrations, loading plants for residents as well as answering any additional questions that may have come up.

While the City of Syracuse continues to strive for an increase in canopy cover on public property through street and park tree plantings, about 80% of Syracuse's canopy is currently on private land. In order to assist in supplementing the public tree plantings and keeping the canopy on privately owned land robust in health and numbers, this free tree giveaway was started.

There is still some information that needs to be collected and compiled to determine if the program had the full intended effect of promoting more tree canopy on privately owned property as well as distributing trees to the neighborhoods where the giveaways were stationed. Some of the approaches for community notification and "advertising" still need to be examined and adjusted to reach these goals but it was clear that the interest of city residents to get free trees was in fact alive and well!



City Arborist Steve Harris speaks with Salt Springs neighborhood community members about the Free Tree Giveaway program.



Community member Andra Leimanis holding a magnolia tree at the Free Tree Giveaway during the Mile Marketplace Event in October.





Schiller Park landscape showing off its fall colors

## Recounting the Schiller Park Community Planting

BY LOGAN REIDSMA

Six in the morning and my alarm clock is beeping at an obnoxious volume. After a few minutes of rolling around I force myself to maneuver towards the coffee machine, my main motivation at this point. It is hard to think that in seven hours a landscape that once contained thickets of a few understory species, predominantly common buckthorn, will be transformed by hundreds of volunteers coming together to improve and foster ownership of an urban green space that was once boasted of containing some of the best views of the city.



An early morning haze hovers over Schiller Park as the crew prepares for the community planting event.

Let us rewind a few months back to the early months of 2022. It is late July, approximately too hot degrees outside to recall and there are roughly 5 crews of youth and young adult crew members spread out along the southwestern slope. Their main task for the next 5 weeks, reduce monocultures of invasive buckthorn through removal and install erosion control devices on the steeper sections of slope. It is slow going, hand clearing along the upper slope that tests our crews interest in urban ecological restoration field work. Without this hard work and commitment, this event would not have been possible.

6:30am, I mount my bike light on my trusty Trek bicycle and start to pedal to the staging site where the previous day, crews staged all 500 plus plants in the trailers and attached them to the trucks, Earl, Princess, and Gandalf. It is pitch black and no one is on the road, the best time to zip along Fayette St. As I arrive at the site, Senior staff have already assembled the staged office items needed for the event. We fire up the trucks, watch as their headlights cut through the darkness, point them towards the drumlin that is Schiller Park and drive off.

Invasive species can be commonplace in urban green spaces and these species can dominate a landscape quickly without dedicated management. One particular species of concern is common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) which originally derives from Europe. According to the 2019 Syracuse Urban Forest Master Plan, Buckthorn makes up approximately 21 percent of the total urban forest and is growing. This exceeds typical species diversity that is strived for in an urban forest, and along with that, buckthorn is also a known invasive species. Buckthorn is commonplace throughout Schiller Park, which is located on the Northside of Syracuse. Schiller Park is home to expansive views of the City of Syracuse and contains White and Red Oak trees of majestic size. However, these viewsheds are not as pristine as they once were and the future of the existing Oak trees is in question due to lack of seedling establishment. Along with dense thickets that could create negative social-human-nature conflicts leading to an unsafe feeling, the landscape is robbed of the ecological processes that it has adapted to over thousands of years. Insert Onondaga Earth Corps and their fleet of volunteers and partner organizations.



7 am, arrival at Schiller Park is imminent and a few of our partners are on site already. Headlamps out and folks start rummaging through plants, confirming their locations and transporting them upslope to their final destination. Hundreds of color coordinated flags are splayed out along the slope indicating where plantings will be. Trees, shrubs, and perennials are on the planting docket for today. Leaf blowers are a constant noise in the background to locate the delineations for the 10 zones and flags laid out the previous day. After two hours of running Maple trees and Asters among other plants around the hillside, the event is starting to shape up. It is exhausting work but with the dedication of the crew the day has gotten off to a strong start. With the volunteer booth prepped for registration and tools laid out it was time for coffee.

10 am, Introductions begin and the dull roar of volunteers cease. Steve Harris, the City of Syracuse Arborist, kicks off the event while welcoming approximately 105 volunteers. 10 groups with about 10 volunteers each are made for each zone. A handful of crew members are leading their own zone and gaining practical leadership skills. One our crew leader Jay's biggest highlights from the event came from seeing crew members mingling and engaging with the volunteers. Each zone leader brought their crew out to the work areas and started getting to it.

I am in zone 4. Zone 4 is about 50 feet long and 50 feet wide located on the bottom of the hillside near the access road and traversing to about the mid section of the slope. It is generally composed of hundreds of dead buckthorn stems, leaf litter, and a few larger oak trees. One critical thing that is missing, various forest understory species. My group starts to work and after a few moments things seem to be flowing rather smoothly. A group is working on planting perennials nearby while another group is using a pick mattock to break through the difficult soil layers so they can plant the larger bare root stock trees. It was gratifying to see such a large group learning and engaging with each other in a positive way. After a few hours of planting and a few broken tools later, groups started to merge and we finished our allotted goals for the day. We even installed erosion control for some of the larger trees!

This event was a success and in many ways a culmination of the entire year for OEC. Crew members and crew leaders were able to demonstrate and apply the growth they had acquired throughout the season while leading groups of volunteers, some of whom had never been to Schiller Park. It forced many people, including myself, out of their comfort zones, but while doing that it fostered a sense of community and place that OEC strives to do daily. It was incredible to see how much change can occur in a landscape in just a few hours. At the end of the event, Onondaga Earth Corps, Friends of Schiller Park, Syracuse Department of Parks and Recreation, Syracuse Parks Conservancy, and 105 volunteers planted 554 plants and installed 306 feet of erosion control on the upper western slope at Schiller Park.



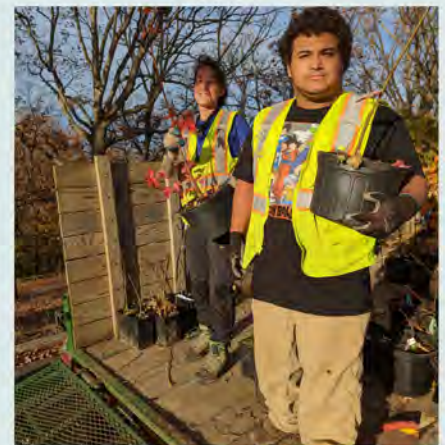
A crowd of over 120 people gather to listen to safety tips and instructions.



A volunteer holds a post pounder while preparing a tree for staking.



Volunteers pause for a photo at the bottom of the round top, as others continue to work into the background.



Program Specialist Kate Littlefield (left) and YA Crewmember Omarian Leroux (right) gather plants to distribute.



# Reflection and Connection

BY JAY HOLMES-PORCH

Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) has changed me. OEC helped me open my eyes to the things around me I wasn't aware of before. From trees to buildings to parks, OEC will have you thinking out of the box. OEC helped me find my voice and helped me become a leader.

I put so much effort into recruiting because when I first started as a crew member I did not expect to like it this much and learn as much as I have about different trades, networking and more. There are a lot of youth and young adults that are interested in different things but don't have any idea where to start or how to get information. To me, Onondaga Earth Corps is a good place to start. By recruiting, I am giving back to my community.

This winter I'm looking forward to getting to know the Advanced Young Adults (AYA) more and helping them with any upcoming goals they want to achieve.



Youth crewmember (right) with Crew leader Jay Holmes-Porch take a photo at Earth Corps Encore 2022.



OEC Crew members pose in front of OEC's Truck "Princess" and their crew leader Jay Holmes-Porch (bottom center).





OEC Staff members Logan Reidsma (left), Kate Abel (middle), and Tay Stenson (right) outside during the CorpsNetwork Corps Rendezvous in New Hampshire.

# The Corps Network Corps Rendezvous

BY TAY STENSON

I had the pleasure of attending the Corps Network's 'Corps Rendezvous' in mid November. I went along with two colleagues, this year was the first time that the conference has been in person post-pandemic. It was my first time traveling to New Hampshire. Such a beautiful but very cold experience. I met so many like minded Leaders in the corps industry, from the East Coast to the West Coast and as far as Hawaii. I had no idea that there are even Corps established that far in the country.

I loved the representation of P.O.C (people of colour), I had the pleasure of meeting Tiffany Madison (Corps Network) . She really affirmed a lot of ideas that I have in mind for OEC's future in regards to my career and parts of our program design. Speaking of which, one of my favorite breakout sessions that I attended was on Recruitment and Outreach. It was refreshing to know that we are not the only ones having difficulties in the same department(s) specifically around recruitment. I also got some really good recruitment ideas that I look forward to implementing as we begin recruiting in the New Year. The conference came at just the right time, we ended our Fall season on 11/1 and the conference was the following week. This experience helped me to brainstorm and really get into our end of year debriefing.

I am ready for 2023, as I feel it will be filled with change that OEC has been needing for some time now. I hope that we get more opportunities to travel and network with great people from all across the world!



Gathered inside, attendees of the Corps Rendezvous sit along the wall as they chat before an activity.





The Young Adult crew and OEC Staff take a walk together for the first time at Pratts Falls at the start of the fall season.

# Crewmember Reflections

BY OMARIAN LEROUX

During my time here at Onondaga Earth Corps I have improved significantly. I can control my anxiety better during social interactions. I have also learned to appreciate and take better care of the environment. All the people I've met are wonderful and working here has made me look forward to waking up each day once again.

BY SAADIYA SHEEKH NUUR

My name is Saadiya Sheekh Nuur, and I am a member of AmeriCorps. This is my first season working with OEC. This season, I learned how to use various green infrastructure maintenance tools, plant trees, and manage natural areas. I've gained so many skills that I'll be able to use in any of my future jobs. This season, I'm grateful for the opportunity provided by OEC to work with incredible and talented individuals.

BY ANTONIO HENDRIX

If I had to choose between the summer and fall seasons I would take the fall. One of the reasons I like the fall is because the weather is better. I also loved the fact that I learned tree planting. My favorite day of the season was going to Pratts Falls and falling a lot of times. My least favorite part was seeing a spot to plant and it's not pre-dug. My favorite event was working at Traveler's Rest and Syracuse Urban Food Forest. I liked Syracuse's Food Forest because of all the pre-dug holes which made life easier. I liked working at Traveler's Rest because I found a better way to get the sod which was using the hoe. Overall the season was about me learning more things for experience and knowledge and I had a lot of fun doing it.



Nana Carter using loppers to break down a branch with Omarian Leroux in the background.

BY SHANA (NANA) CARTER

My experience at OEC has been great. OEC has taught me a lot of team player skills and ways to get connected to help the community. OEC would challenge your environment skills, but whatever you didn't know they had great Crew Leaders to help guide the way. I definitely would recommend this program to anyone who is interested in the bettering of our community. Even if you don't know what you want to do in life this is a great program to learn and grow from!





Youth Crewmembers pose with a tree that they had just planted together.

## Thank You For Pushing Us Over Our Year-End Fundraising Goal!

Towards the end of the year our Fund Development Team set a \$5000 Year-End Fundraising Goal, and with the help of all of our supporters, we have surpassed this goal ending at a total of \$8,754. That's \$3,754 more than our initial goal!

Thank you to all of our donors for being so generous and continuing to support us in our mission to empower youth to be active participants in creating positive change for the community and the environment. We hope that you can see how much your support influences the quality of our programming for the youth and young adults in our program.

Thank you!  
Yvonne Chu  
(OEC Office Manager)

### DONATE

For more information, visit [www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/donate](http://www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/donate)

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#### Fund-A-Truck

Donate towards our fleet vehicles. Fund-A-Truck goal: \$50,000

#### Bottle Bonanza

Redeem your returnables at one of our redemption center partners. Visit our website for more details:

[www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/bottle-bonanza/](http://www.onondagaeearthcorps.org/bottle-bonanza/)



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### ABOUT THE ONONDAGA EARTH CORPS

When the Eli MacDonald Green Team was restructured in 2005 as the Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) for local communities, OEC was formed to:

- Help youth understand the relationship between people and the urban ecosystem
- Engage youth in hands-on community and environmental service learning projects
- Train youth for future jobs and careers in environmental fields
- Empower youth by developing their leadership abilities that help them analyze situations, solve problems and implement strategies to improve their communities

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