



NEW YORK STATE  
URBAN FORESTRY COUNCIL

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

[NYSUFC.ORG](https://nysufc.org)



## VISION

... that every New York State community recognize the value of trees and maximize their use to improve quality of life.

## MISSION

... to engage in public, private, and volunteer partnerships doing planting, management, and education leading to robust urban and community forests throughout New York State.

## WHO WE ARE

The New York State Urban Forestry Council (NYSUFC) is the largest urban forestry advocacy group in the State. It was formed to advise, support, and collaborate with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Urban and Community Forestry program. The NYSUFC came together informally in 1992, became formally organized in 1999, and received its 501(c)3 non-profit designation in early 2000.

The Council has a 20-member statewide board of directors and an 8-member executive committee. Council members include natural resource professionals, city foresters, nonprofit staff, elected officials, municipal and corporate employees, students, and dedicated community volunteers.

# Steve Harris

## Outgoing President of NYSUFC and Urban Tree Champion

[Read the full story on the NYSUFC blog, \*Taking Root\*](#)



Steve Harris, the outgoing President of New York State Urban Forestry Council, has also acted as Syracuse City Forester for twenty years. He is an impassioned advocate for urban trees.

Steve served in the Peace Corps in The Gambia, West Africa after college, working with farmers to grow trees for food and work with them to start tree nurseries. He attended Paul Smith's College and then received a graduate degree from SUNY College Environmental Science and Forestry. His master's thesis focused on sustainable practices within the Forest Products Industry.

He joined Syracuse as City Forester in July 2010. He had interviewed for traditional forestry positions but ultimately decided to go with urban forestry "because those jobs felt like they were more about people and more suited to my experience gained from Peace Corps."

When Steve started, "it was me and two tree workers in a bucket truck. Now there is a four-person tree crew with an inspector. We have contractors for removals and emergencies and stump grinding and planting. Also, another certified arborist, a municipal specialist in a community forestry role, a landscape architect reviewing designs and enforcing permits and a full-time database manager." He says, "We have an amazing staff at all levels!"

Steve joined the Board of the New York State Urban Forestry Council twenty years ago. Of becoming President, he says simply, "It was my turn time to serve."

He will continue with the Council's Executive Committee as Treasurer. "I felt like it was important to carry on with some of the programs we started when I was president— like our equity, justice and inclusion efforts. We need to break down the functional barriers that prevent disadvantaged communities from applying for the Council's planting grants."

He hopes that as Treasurer he will also have an impact on funding educational opportunities. Young adults aged 19 to 25, he says, "might stick around in the tree community for a while, but most are not choosing careers in trees. That connection to nature starts young. If you don't begin exposing a person to the environment early on, it's harder later."

"I'm proud of the Council," Steve says. "I love being connected to other locales to try to get to another level of urban forestry." His roles as City Forester and President of the Council have intersected, as he sees it. "I like thinking about where a community is at with its program and where it could go next. One of the things that I think would benefit all of us is a state-wide urban tree canopy assessment showing change over the last decade. Making that information available for all municipalities could be a catalyst for change, especially in those places experiencing dramatic canopy loss. You can't manage what you don't measure. It would be a call to action."

# Thirtieth Annual New York ReLeaf Conference Comes to Long Island!

[Read Part 1 on the NYSUFC blog, \*Taking Root\*](#) • [Read Part 2 on the NYSUFC blog, \*Taking Root\*](#)

The thirtieth annual New York ReLeaf Conference convened from July 20-22, 2023 on the campus of Hofstra University. It proved to be a beautiful weekend for a conference dedicated to the health and preservation of the natural world. The theme of the gathering was “Keeping Trees in Mind: Planning for a Better Tomorrow.” ReLeaf is the joint program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Urban Forestry Council and the U.S. Forest Service. ReLeaf Region 1 hosted the gathering, which brought together representatives of such disparate entities as Woodlawn Conservancy and PSEG Long Island, Plan It Wild and PlanIt Geo, the Village of Bellerose and the City of Rochester.

On Friday morning, Gloria Van Duyne of NYSDEC opened the conference by introducing Phil Healey, Superintendent of Public Works for Lynbrook, as the newly sworn in President of the New York State Urban Forestry Council. [pic-Phil Healey and Dan Lambe] She then welcomed Fiona Watt, New York State Forester and Director of Lands and Forests for NYSDEC. With a previous tenure of 25 years at New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, Watt now presides over five million acres of state land.

The first keynote was Vincent Simeone, Director of Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park, who spoke on the topic, “Selecting Trees That Thrive in Urban and Suburban Landscapes.” “It’s a great time to be in this industry,” he said. “We live in turbulent times, but we learned from Hurricane Sandy which plants did well and which didn’t.”

Arbor Day Foundation CEO Dan Lambe followed with a second keynote, focusing on “Finding the Chemistry in Urban Forestry.” He introduced the idea of a periodic table for urban forestry. Its critical elements would include city foresters, nonprofits and tree boards, among other parties. Every combination of elements requires “a catalyst — someone or something that creates action.” Lambe inspired the group with his conclusion: “We all have the opportunity to be that catalyst, that spark, to be the person who causes change.” >>

Conference attendees conveyed the reasons they attended. Noreen Riordan of birdsong landscape design in Rochester said she was at the conference “for inspiration and to find out what other people are doing. It gives you hope.”

left to right: Noreen Riordan, Jonathan Clemente, Cereza Bloodwood, Peter Strom, and Mike Wolfe



left to right: Dan Gaidasz, Matt Viglucci, Dan Lambe, Gloria Van Duyne, and Christina McLaughlin. Photo: DEC





Vinnie Drzewucki



Nina Bassuk

*(continued from the previous page)*

Saturday featured engaging workshops. Mina Vescera, Extension Educator of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, spoke about “Urban tree troubles? Test, don’t guess.” Vinnie Drzewucki, Urban Forestry and Horticulture Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County explained “How to Plant a Tree Using Best Management Practices.” Bill Jacobs, program Manager, Long Island Invasive Species Management Area, presented on “The impact of Invasive Trees In the Urban Environment.”

Nina Bassuk, Professor Emeritus, Cornell University, delivered closing remarks on the topic of “Infrastructure Innovation for Urban Tree Health and Sustainability.”



left to right: Kelley DeVine, Rebecca Kassay, Anne Leahey

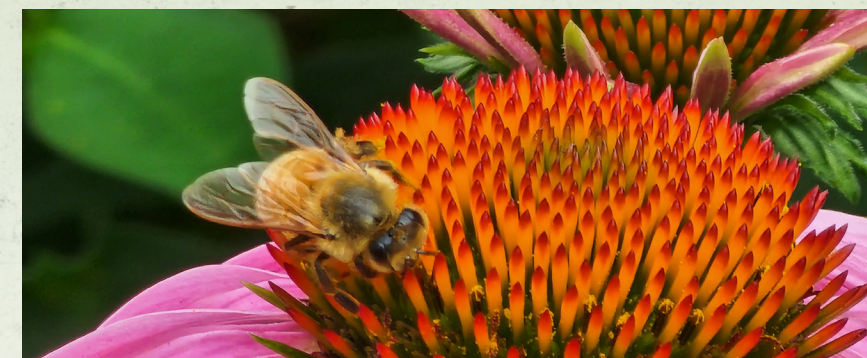
Rebecca Kassay, Deputy Mayor in Port Chester, talked about establishing a tree nursery on the village’s municipal golf course property, growing red oaks, white pines, white spruce and an assortment of shrubs. She, along with members of the Village Tree Committee, hoped that by attending the ReLeaf Conference they would “bring expertise and accomplishments from across the state back to the Village.” Hers was a sentiment echoed by many at the Conference.

A gathering at Jones Beach State Park’s Environmental Center the evening of Friday, July 21 featured a plentiful raw bar along with beer and an informal repast. Some swam. Some found treasures on the sand. Others simply socialized as dusk fell. A good time was had by all.

right: Beach scene  
below, left to right: Marianne Marichal, Mary Downey, and Andrew Ullman



Additional workshops included a hands-on tree planting demo at Hofstra Arboretum with Michael Runkel, Director of Grounds and Landscape.



# FINANCIALS

## Funding for the NYSUFC in 2023 came from:

- A direct grant from the USDA Forest Service at the request of the NYSDEC Urban and Community Forestry program
- Membership dues
- Unrestricted donations from Council members and supporters
- Proceeds from the annual conference and regional workshops
- Sponsorships

## The 2023 U.S. Forest Service Grant monies provided funding for:



**\$5,500**

2024 ReLeaf Conference



**TREE CITY USA®**

**\$6,500**

Tree City/Tree Line/Tree Campus USA recognition ceremony and other support of ReLeaf Committee activities



**\$10,000**

2024 Quick Start Grants and administration



**\$1,500**

Scholarships



**\$5,000**

Tree City USA Reward Grants



**\$9,100**

Blog, newsletter, Annual Report preparation and social media promotion

**\$3,000**

Council website updates

**\$48,000**

Administration/  
Executive Secretary

**\$2,000**

Office expenses

# OUR GRANTS

## NYSDEC UCF GRANT PROGRAM

The Council supports the NYSDEC Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program, which is funded by the NY Environmental Protection Fund.

After an application period in 2023, NYSDEC released Round 16 of the Urban and Community Forestry Grants in April 2024. \$3 million was available for tree inventories, community forest management plans (CFMPs), tree planting and tree maintenance. Eighteen tree inventory and CFMP grants totaling \$978,817 were awarded in December. Thirty-two tree planting and tree maintenance grants totaling \$2.04 million were awarded in April 2024.

In October 2023, DEC released a special grant funded by the Federal Inflation Reduction Act through the USDA Forest Service. \$12.9 million was available for CFMP implementation and ash tree management, with applications due in 2024.

## QUICK START GRANTS

In 2023, through U.S. Forest Service funding, NYSUFC was able to offer its eighth year of Quick Start grants of up to \$1,000 each to small communities or nonprofits. These were intended for inaugural Arbor Day celebrations and the formation of shade tree committees within municipalities — activities meant to kick-start a community forestry program. In 2023, five communities received awards.

## COUNCIL TREE CITY USA REWARD GRANTS

In 2023, for the third year, NYSUFC issued Tree City USA Reward grants to communities that had been a Tree City USA for at least five years. Awards of up to \$1000 each were awarded to five municipalities to plant large specimen trees ora grove of trees in a prominent location within the community. The intent of this grant is to encourage municipalities to sustain their community forestry program and maintain their status as a Tree City USA community through a celebratory tree planting. The grants were made possible by a combination of USDA Forest Service grant funds and unrestricted NYSUFC funds.

## COUNCIL TREE CAMPUS K-12 GRANT

Plans got underway for a new pilot program. NYSUFC announced that it would issue tree planting materials and supplies (with an in-kind grant of up to \$500) to K-12 schools located in disadvantaged school districts, intended to establish a campus-based tree program, and to hold a tree planting event in the spring of 2024 celebrating Arbor Day. In addition, each TREE TEAM school was assigned a tree industry or urban forestry professional to assist in all elements of developing the program. The intent of this grant is to assist schools in connecting students with trees, and to move the school toward becoming recognized as an Arbor Day Foundation Tree Campus K-12. Nine schools received grants for the 2024 planning season.

# The Village of Hempstead Has a Swamp White Oak Planting Celebration for Arbor Day

[Read the full story on the NYSUFC blog, \*Taking Root\*](#)

On April 22, 2023 the Village of Hempstead celebrated Arbor Day in Hempstead Park, Denton Green, located on James A. Garner Way. The event provided community members and students an opportunity to become involved in improving the environment.

Participants planted three balled-and-burlapped swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*) trees, which were funded largely by a NYS Urban Forestry Council (NYSUFC) Quick Start Grant as part of the Village of Hempstead's efforts to become a Tree City USA community. Swamp white oaks were selected after consulting with Andrew Hillman, NYSUFC Past President and current Quick Start Grant Committee member.

The Village of Hempstead Community Development Agency (CDA) and the Village of Hempstead Department of Public Works coordinated with Matthew Viglucci, Program Specialist of Urban & Community Forestry

for NYSDEC regarding the tree plantings and aftercare. Vincent Drzewucki, Urban Forestry and Horticulture Educator from CCE Nassau County, discussed the event plans and aftercare with the Village staff.

At the celebration, Village of Hempstead Mayor, Waylyn Hobbs Jr. conveyed the importance of promoting tree conservation in the Village of Hempstead. The Village CDA Commissioner spoke to the students about the NYSUFC Quick Start Grant and the Village's efforts to become a designated Tree City USA. The Village partnered with the Hempstead Union Free School District, Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC) of Nassau County Community Action Program and the Adelphi University STEP/LPP Program. A total of forty-six K-12 students participated, along with many parents and local school teachers and administrators. Flowers, mulch, and topsoil were provided by Adelphi University for the event.



# OAKWOOD CEMETERY WALKING TOUR

Hosted by  
ReLeaf Region 7

[Read the full story on the NYSUFC blog, \*Taking Root\*](#)

Two dozen enthusiasts accompanied Don Leopold on a tree biology and ID walk through historic Oakwood Cemetery in Syracuse on June 21 to learn about the 160-acre site's fantastic urban forest. Leopold, Distinguished Teaching Professor, Department of Environmental Biology at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, is known not only for his extensive academic contributions but for his one hundred thirty-five popular videos on YouTube that describe species from eastern hophornbeam to hackberry to shagbark hickory. He is the author of *Trees of New York, Native and Naturalized* (2003, Syracuse University Press).

Attendees came not only from Syracuse but Ithaca, DeWitt, Manlius, Honeoye Falls and other locales to spend two hours on the cemetery's trails and lawns. One participant, Robbie Lewis of Syracuse, expressed in simple terms what brought so many on the walk: "We want to know what the trees are here."

The privately owned Cemetery's preservation group, Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association, offers maps for self-guided walking tours (<https://hocpa.org/maps-tours/self-guided-tours/>).



Dana Paul, Jeanne Grace, Suzanne Motheral, Kevin Vorstadt

The group examined a variety of species including persimmon, cucumber magnolia, Native American larch, yellowwood and Kentucky Coffee Tree. "The leaves of Kentucky Coffee Tree," Leopold said, are the largest of any in New York State. A ginkgo provided an object lesson in how a plant can survive despite difficulties. It seemed to be thriving despite a significant wound on one side. "Ninety percent of the trunk is dead," said Leopold. "Trees are good at compartmentalization."

Leopold singled out a black oak to ID. "It has blackish bark," he said. "The acorns look like a top, angled buds covered with a dense rug of hairs. It's the only oak that that when you cut into the bark has bright yellow on the inside, and it has a bitter taste from its high level of tannin." The last stop was a magnificent bur oak, a tree "easy to grow from seed."

"He's a great teacher," said Carolyn Granley, a member of the Conservation Board of the Village of Honeoye Falls, as the tour began to wind down. Christina McLaughlin, DEC Urban and Community Forestry Partnership Coordinator, said, "I'm really glad to have a good turnout for our walk with Dr. Leopold. And it's such a nice day out, with so many communities together."



Bur oak



Christina McLaughlin, DEC



Leopold with Kentucky Coffee Tree Branch



Carolyn Granley, Conservation Board, Village of Honeoye Falls

# STAYING CONNECTED in 2023



58,331

views of the  
NYSUFC Blog



656

average monthly readers for  
our e-newsletter *Taking Root*



199

YouTube channel  
video views



867

Instagram followers



789

Facebook followers



441

X followers

## 2023 MEMBERSHIP

In 2023, there were **128** memberships  
representing **336** total members:



80

Individuals



10

Non-Profits  
(4 members each)



6

Small Businesses  
(6 members each)



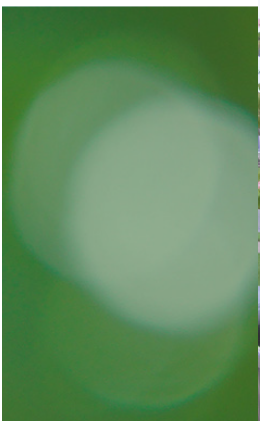
4

Corporate  
(12 members each)



26

Government Agencies  
(5 members each)



*Cornus kousa 'Satomi'* Planted With Diameter Size of a Pencil  
in 1999. Photo Christine Banigan. Trees, Please! 4/22/2024

## 2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

| Name                 | Affiliation                                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Christopher Anderson | Association of Towns of the State of New York   |
| Dr. Nina Bassuk      | Cornell Urban Horticulture Institute            |
| Mark Beamish         | Orange and Rockland Utilities                   |
| Brenda Cagle         | Village of Red Hook                             |
| Karen Emmerich       | Town of Warwick (Tree Commissioner)             |
| Jeanne Grace         | City of Ithaca                                  |
| Rachel Grumm         | NYS Parks – Queens Borough                      |
| Terry Hawkridge      | Rustic Pines Tree Care                          |
| Andrew Hillman       | Urban Forest Advocate                           |
| Jay Lavigne          | City of Albany                                  |
| Greg Michel          | Onondaga Earth Corps                            |
| Andrew Newman        | NYC Parks                                       |
| Judy Pangman         | City of Oneonta                                 |
| Paul Paradine        | NYSEG                                           |
| Andrew Place         | City of Rochester                               |
| Alicia Ragusa        | Alicia J. Ragusa, Esq.<br>Holistic Law Practice |
| Noreen Riordan       | Birdsong Landscape Design, ISA Arborist         |
| Michael Sawyer       | Buffalo Olmsted Park Conservancy                |
| Leanna Wohl-Nugent   | CCE Onondaga                                    |
| Jean Zimmerman       | Arborist and Author                             |

## 2023 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

| Name             | Title          | Affiliation                      |
|------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Phil Healey      | President      | Incorporated Village of Lynbrook |
| Michael DeMarco  | Vice President | City of Watertown                |
| Stephen Harris   | Treasurer      | City of Syracuse                 |
| Mike Treglia     | Secretary      | The Nature Conservancy           |
| Lori Brockelbank | At-Large       | Davey Resource Group             |
| Joe Charap       | At-Large       | Green-Wood Cemetery              |
| Ross Hassinger   | At-Large       | City of Buffalo                  |
| Glen Roberts     | At-Large       | ReLeaf Region 6                  |

## EX-OFFICIO

| Name                 | Affiliation                                                                                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Danielle Gift        | USDA Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry Program Coordinator for New England and New York |
| Eric Greenfield      | USDA Forest Service Forester, Northern Research Station, Forest Inventory and Analysis          |
| Christina McLaughlin | NYSDEC Urban & Community Forestry Partnership Coordinator                                       |
| Rob Messenger        | NYSDEC Chief of Bureau of Forest Resource Management                                            |
| Martin Mullarkey     | Retired Utility Arborist and Educator                                                           |
| Gloria Van Duyne     | NYSDEC Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator                                         |

## STAFF

| Name               | Title                                     |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Donna Gurnett      | Executive Secretary for NYSUFC            |
| Christina B. Smith | Equity, Justice, and Inclusion Consultant |
| Sarah Gugercin     | Website Edits and Graphic Designer        |
| Jean Zimmerman     | Editor, <i>Taking Root</i>                |



## KEY PARTNERS

USDA Forest Service

NYSDEC Urban and Community Forestry Program

and

Arbor Day Foundation

American Society of Consulting Arborists

Cornell Urban Horticulture Institute

International Society of Arboriculture

National Grid

New York State Arborists

New York State Nursery and Landscape Association

Onondaga Earth Corps

Society of American Foresters

Society of Municipal Arborists

Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition

Tree Care Industry Association

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Environmental  
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