

# DEARBIRD

THE NEWSLETTER OF *Partnerships for Parks*



winter2011

DEAR FRIENDS,

The great urban planner Jane Jacobs said that a city is made great by the diversity of its neighborhoods. We agree with Ms. Jacobs and would add that vibrant green spaces, and active participation by citizens in the creation and maintenance of those spaces, also makes a city great. We see this clearly in New York, a place that's richer in so many ways because of the work volunteer groups contribute to creating parks and playgrounds that serve as welcoming places for their communities. On March 12, when Partnerships for Parks hosts our first citywide conference by and for parks supporters, we look forward to sharing the innovative ways you've made your community great through park stewardship and advocacy. It's your dedication and commitment to parks that ensures the next generation inherits a city that would make Ms. Jacobs proud.

Sincerely,  
Adrian Benepe, Commissioner,  
Parks & Recreation  
David Rivel, Executive Director,  
City Parks Foundation

MARCH IS A TOUGH MONTH IF YOU'RE A PARK VOLUNTEER. It's too cold and rainy to host clean-up events, but after months of winter snow the urge to go outdoors to plant spring bulbs may be impossible to contain.

Luckily, this March is different. That's because on March 12, Friends groups across the city will be front and center at **Transforming and Connecting New York and New Yorkers: Our First Citywide Conference By and For Parks Supporters**.

The day-long conference at Hunter College is a new undertaking for Partnerships, but one that's been in the works for some time, says Partnerships' Director Jason Schwartz: "We've participated in many innovative approaches to transforming communities and developing long-lasting positive change. This time, we wanted to create an opportunity for our partners to meet each other, inspire each other, and share their ideas directly."

Tina Johnstone, a founding member of Kayak Staten Island, is typical of the conference's presenters. A long-time park activist, she'll be speaking on a topic that affects all park groups: volunteer recruitment. "Last season, our third year of offering free, public kayaking, we had 60 different people help launch over 2,000 people onto the water," says Tina.

“Volunteers make our program happen. Volunteer recruitment and happy engagement are universal challenges to any community program. We’re excited to have this opportunity to share what works with our fellow park advocates.”

To plan the conference, Partnerships’ staff discussed the most common issues affecting park groups, from advocacy to volunteerism. Then, consulting and collaborating with group representatives, staff created a diverse array of workshops, panels, and small group sessions, designed so that groups leave the conference with stronger connections to one another and stewardship efforts city-wide.

The day starts with an inspiring panel featuring Green Shores NYC, Bronx River Alliance, and City Life is Moving Bodies, three groups that have partnered with Partnerships’ Catalyst project to bring dramatic change to once under-served communities. Together, they’ll share what it takes to create a defining event for a park, one

that can draw hundreds of volunteers and, over time, become a truly volunteer-run community festival.

Attendees can then choose from a range of breakout sessions. In **Power and Value of Volunteerism**, groups share stories about leveraging outreach efforts to influence decision makers. **Building Bridges: How to Engage Diverse Communities** explores how identifying universal themes can bring new community members to the stewardship table. And **Beyond the Logo: Effective Branding Strategies** focuses on communicating your group’s identity using eye-catching promotional materials.

To keep audiences on their toes, **Speed Networking: How to Create a Five Minute Connection** lets participants practice delivering fast but powerful pitch speeches in a round-robin format with expert peers. And for those interested in learning to use mapping as a community-building tool, a session called **Mapping: Explore, Engage, Connect**, will be offered.

Finally, in the **Addressing Challenges** workshop, groups form teams in a ‘Choose-your-Adventure’ game to role play conflict-resolution strategies.

In between sessions, attendees can visit a Park Stories recording booth; grab information at the Infoshare resource bank; visit a gallery of posters, brochures, and signs created over 15 years by community groups with Partnerships’ support; and stop by tables staffed by city agency and non-profit representatives offering practical tip sheets.

The conference concludes with a celebratory reception, leaving time for socializing and networking.

Michael Palma, who with Basia Nikonorow serves as Co-Community Programmer of Montefiore Park Neighborhood Association (MPNA), is looking forward to sharing how their organization strengthened relations in their upper Manhattan neighborhood by organizing park clean-ups and social activities. “By involving the

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## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Javon Johnson

Every weekend from April to October, you’ll find Javon Johnson in Nehemiah Park. He’s not playing ball though; instead Johnson is helping high school students complete college applications and welcoming college students home with Empowering Youth Towards Excellence (EYTE), the nonprofit he founded in 2004. Last year, EYTE mentored over 135 teens and sent care packages to nearly 60 college students. In turn, EYTE youth donated over 100 items of winter clothing to the Lakota nation through a community service project in which they all participate. Now, supported by a Partnerships for Parks Capacity Fund grant, Johnson is expanding to year-round programming and leveraging his success to advocate for a permanent EYTE office. We asked him to share how he’s changed his community by engaging teens and young adults.

*Q: What’s the secret to working with youth?*

A: Being in the park with organized activities. We do sports clinics, not just tournaments, so everyone’s invited no matter what their athletic ability. So through regular activities, word gets around.

*Q: What’s the biggest challenge working in a park?*

A: Lack of supplies. We bring in water, fruits, and vegetables. We created a nutrition program to address

obesity. But we also say everybody has to contribute, so we started Empowering 100, where former students donate \$5.00 a month to fund introductory college trips for the next group of kids.

*Q: When did you know you were having an impact?*

A: When we got a new jungle gym and basketball backboard, because we were doing It’s My Park Day and making the park safe for kids.

*Q: What advice would you offer other groups who want to engage youth?*

A: Have high expectations. Believe anything and everything is possible. If you don’t believe they can do it, it can’t be done. You just need a vision.



*Javon Johnson (front row, far right) with EYTE youth.*

### The 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Bronx Parks Speak Up “Bronx Waterways: Clean and Accessible”

Saturday, February 26, 11:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Lehman College, Faculty Dining Room

With Bronx Waterways as its theme, this free, day-long event sponsored by the Bronx Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces, Con Edison, and Verizon features presentations, workshops, and a panel discussion. Learn about green walls, water safety, and plans for waterfront access. For additional details, directions, and information, visit [www.bronxpeakup.org](http://www.bronxpeakup.org).

### Going Green in Queens 2011:

A Greening, Educational and Networking Conference

Saturday, March 26, 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Al Oerter Recreation Center, 131-40 Fowler Ave., Flushing

Join the Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces for a free day of workshops, films, giveaways, food, and fun. Learn about composting, tree pruning, and energy alternatives at this jam-packed event. High school students are especially encouraged to attend! Sponsored by Con Edison, NY Mets, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans – Queens Chapter #31028, Cornucopia Society, Partnerships for Parks, and NYC Department of Parks & Recreation. For more information and to register, visit <http://goinggreeninqueens2011.eventbrite.com>.

### Green: Earth, Community, and You

Saturday, April 16, 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

(Rain date: April 17) Stuyvesant Square Park, Manhattan

Celebrate Earth Day with a unique fashion show of creative outfits from recycled materials and other earth friendly activities. Sponsored by Stuyvesant Community Alliance.

### St. George Day Festival: 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Art & Literary Happening

Saturday, April 23, 12:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

(Rain date: April 30) Tompkinsville Park, Staten Island

Enjoy free performances, a giant dragon puppet show, all-day readings, a book fair, food, and much more! Supported in part by City Parks Foundation and Council of the Arts and Humanities Staten Island. For more information, check out [www.stgeorgedaysi.com](http://www.stgeorgedaysi.com).

### Spring It’s My Park Day

Saturday, May 21, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Citywide

It’s not too early to start planning for Spring It’s My Park Day, when thousands of New Yorkers come together to help care for and celebrate New York City parks. Work with a Friends group in your area to plan programming or organize a clean-up or painting project in preparation for the warm weather. For updates, please check [www.PartnershipsForParks.org](http://www.PartnershipsForParks.org).

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community in our park's future redesign, the MPNA is empowering the neighborhood to have a voice in matters that concern them and enabling them to participate directly in the placemaking process," according to Michael.

And, Basia adds, "As presenters, we're looking forward to learning about all the great community projects around the city, but especially how others are dealing with their challenges. That's where our real learning happens."

To learn more about the conference, visit [www.PartnershipsForParks.org](http://www.PartnershipsForParks.org), or contact Conference Organizer Christianna Gozzi at (212) 360-8121 or [CGozzi@CityParksFoundation.org](mailto:CGozzi@CityParksFoundation.org).

There is a \$10 conference registration fee. Please note that space is limited, and registration is on a first-come first-served basis.

## tip box

The Partnerships conference is all about connecting. But for those who find meeting and greeting difficult, we asked City Parks Foundation's Director of Government Relations, Nicole Johnson Yearwood, who regularly schmoozes in her job, to share her favorite tips for making the most of an event:

**Know Your Goal:** Why are you at the conference? Do you want to learn new information? Meet groups who share your vision? Be clear on your purpose, and focus on speaking with people who can help you, then work the room.

**Choose Your Words:** Instead of asking people, "What do you do?" try "What brings you here?" Discovering a shared interest with someone can help form a bond.

**Work Your Cards:** Jot down notes on business cards to remind you where you met a person, what advice she or he can offer, and important information to spark a connection when you next meet.

## did you know

The City of New York Department of Parks & Recreation with the Design Trust for Public Space just released **High Performance Landscape Guidelines: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Parks for NYC**. The manual supports new park creation

while offering strategies to reduce negative environmental impact.

**Sample recommendations include:**

- Keeping more rain water in parks and using more native plants
- Reducing concrete to prevent urban heat island effect
- Increasing park connectivity to emphasize biking and walking
- Improving design to save labor, reduce expenses, and decrease capital replacements

[www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_about/go\\_greener/green\\_capital.html](http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_about/go_greener/green_capital.html)

# LEAFLET

THE NEWSLETTER OF *Partnerships for Parks*, A JOINT PROGRAM OF CITY PARKS FOUNDATION AND THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION

## winter2011

## How to reach us

[www.PartnershipsForParks.org](http://www.PartnershipsForParks.org)

[www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks)

[www.CityParksFoundation.org](http://www.CityParksFoundation.org)

To contact *Partnerships for Parks* or for information on volunteering in parks, call (212) 360-1357 or call the City's non-emergency hotline, 311.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR PARKS helps New Yorkers work together to make neighborhood parks thrive. We strengthen our diverse, growing network of dedicated park volunteers and groups by creating opportunities for them to celebrate their parks and accomplishments, access resources, become more effective leaders in their communities, and work with government to affect decisions about their parks.

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor  
City of New York

Adrian Benepe, Commissioner  
Parks & Recreation

David Rivel, Executive Director  
City Parks Foundation

Jason Schwartz, Director  
Partnerships for Parks

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for PARKS**



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Parks & Recreation

CityParks  
Foundation

EDITORS: *Wylie Goodman, Melissa Garcia, Channaly Philipp* WRITERS: *Wylie Goodman, Christianna Gozzi*  
DESIGN: *Anne LaFond*