Architecture Students to Partner in Developing Citywide Arboretum

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Architecture Students to Partner in Developing Citywide Arboretum

The Newport Tree Society will collaborate with students to create citywide reforestation plans and to preserve existing tree canopies.

To kick off Roger Williams University’s partnership on The Newport Arboretum project, 94 students, faculty and staff removed invasive species at Newport’s Ballard Park on RWU’s annual Community Connections day of service.

August 28, 2015 | Jill Rodrigues ’05

NEWPORT, R.I. – With plans for numerous projects throughout the year – including planting trees and helping to envision urban forest renewal across the city – students and faculty in the School of Architecture, Art and Historic Preservation (SAAHP) at Roger Williams University have embarked on a partnership with the Newport Tree Society to develop a citywide arboretum.

Part of SAAHP’s larger endeavor to commit academic and volunteer efforts to combat climate change locally, the partnership will dedicate several years of volunteer service to The Newport Arboretum project to assist the city in achieving its arboretum plan via the school’s Macro Living Learning Community: Reforestation for Climate Change and graduate architecture students. The School of Education is also developing plans to partner in educational outreach around the project. The effort will be coordinated through RWU’s Center for Macro Projects and Diplomacy and the Feinstein Center for Service Learning & Community Engagement.
“We searched for a project that would capture the hearts of students in committing to service with an environmental impact throughout the year,” said Stephen White, dean of the School of Architecture, Art and Historic Preservation. “With architecture, you plan and build things that are visible – and with reforestation, you can quantify the positive environmental impact tree-by-tree.”

Established in 2011, the aim of The Newport Arboretum – a division of the Newport Tree Society – is reforestation of special tree collections that reflect the city’s horticulture heritage on private and public land throughout Newport, as well as to cultivate and preserve tree canopies in city parks and public spaces.

The Newport Tree Society, working with the City of Newport and partners such as the Rhode Island Tree Council and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, will collaborate with architecture students to imagine and plan for special tree collections created throughout the city, plant and maintain them. For the long-term ecological restoration partnership, all RWU students will be invited to train with the Newport Tree Society and Rhode Island Tree Council on horticulture stewardship, from removing invasive species to surveying existing tree specimens and planting varieties of desirable tree species.

“The Newport Arboretum would like to focus significant energy toward training students in ecological restoration over the coming decade,” according to Tina Dolen, executive director of the Newport Tree Society. “We look forward to working with Roger Williams to develop a trained conservation workforce that will participate in habitat restoration efforts island-wide.”

To kick off the partnership, a contingent of 94 students, faculty and staff armed with shovels, clippers and bow saws deployed to Newport’s Ballard Park to tackle a meadow and park trails choked with invasive plants as part of RWU’s annual Community Connections day of service on Monday, Aug. 24.

Throughout the year Ballard Park gets small groups that direct volunteer efforts on trash cleanup, according to Friends of Ballard Park Executive Director Colleen McGrath – but with a volunteer unit the size of the Roger Williams crew committed that day, they could focus on bigger jobs in the 13-acre nature preserve.

“We want this to be a place where the public can come in and connect with nature,” McGrath said. “Having a group of this size allows us to remove invasives, prune back the trails and to clean the rockface.”

Ashley Perry, an educational studies major, appreciated the first-hand lesson in ecological preservation work via Community Connections day – a mandatory introduction to volunteer service for all freshmen.

“I don’t usually do yard work, so it’s a great experience to step outside of my comfort zone,” said Perry, who hails from Attleboro, Mass. “And I’m glad I get to have the opportunity to give back to the community.”