

Urban Outdoors

No. 108 – June 10, 2005

Working for a more Humane New York

A SPECIAL GATEWAY ISSUE

*From time to time, Urban Outdoors devotes a whole issue to one program or place. As we prepare for our upcoming **Gateway Fund Raising Party** honoring Maria Burks and Barry Sullivan, the new management team at National Parks of New York Harbor and Gateway National Recreation Area, we thought we would bring you up to date about progress at Gateway's Jamaica Bay Unit, and especially our role in that progress. The recent changes within the National Park Service in New York City offer Friends of Gateway a special opportunity to expand its role in the stewardship of our National Park, Gateway National Recreation Area.*

It has long been our philosophy that bringing New Yorkers out to Gateway to help build the park would give them a special pride in ownership of the place. We believe that creating a series of hands-on volunteer projects will enrich the lives of those people that participate and enrich the whole city with the results. We have heard nothing but encouragement from the Park about various plans to work with them to make improvements. It is Friends of Gateway's challenge to continue to prove we are able to accomplish what we take on. That's where you come in.

Tickets are still available to our party scheduled for Tuesday evening, June 21 from 6-8:30 pm at the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace 28 E 20th Street, Manhattan. Join us for convivial conversation, great food and drink, and the satisfaction of helping NOSC/FOG further its Gateway programs. This is a good opportunity to meet the people who will be helping to shape the New York region's National Park.

The invitation can be accessed at www.treebranch.com.

To sweeten the pot, National Parks of New York Harbor and New York Water Taxi has provided a limited number of FREE passes to their summer Harbor Tour. If you have never been on NYC's water taxis you have missed a fun ride. The passes are good for purchaser and a guest. They will be distributed to the next 30 people who purchase tickets to the party at our website. Info: http://www.treebranch.net/June_Funder.htm.

SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES

Thirty years ago, former military bases were joined with other properties on the outer edge of New York Harbor to form Gateway National Recreation Area (GNRA). The expectation was to be for urban restoration what Yosemite and Yellowstone were for wild area preservation. Gateway properties in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and Sandy Hook, New Jersey make up the region's largest park, but the separate units each have their own identity and disparate constituencies. Gateway has never received the influx of Federal funding that was expected to launch the park, and thus the greensward has not completely lived up to the lofty expectations outlined in the Park's visionary General Management Plan.

Gateway National Recreation Area *has however* come a long way in thirty years. Beaches in Staten Island and New Jersey have never looked better. Wildlife restoration around Gateway has made the place more hospitable for critters on land, sea and air. Gateway has become an international destination for ecotourism. Active recreation is encouraged with well-maintained ball fields that are sometimes integrated into improved animal habitat. Historic infrastructure is protected and improved with the kind of quality interpretation for which the National Park Service is famous. Partnerships have been formed with interest groups, including Friends of Gateway (FoG), that will encourage new park resources to be developed, and existing ones to be further improved.

A NEW WAY TO BUILD A GREAT PARK

In the past few years, Gateway management has come to the realization that they must benefit by turning to outside hands to help build the park. Friends of Gateway has played an important part over the years, including advocating for a NYC National Park, promoting park activities, supporting the research and development of the Gateway Greenway and important volunteer based landscape restoration work within the park. FoG is now uniquely positioned to bring together hands-on public involvement and financial support from the public and private sectors. In the past few years the organization has been focused primarily on being a catalyst for change at Jamaica Bay because that park unit has the potential to serve the largest number of people and has seen less “formal” development.

GROWING CHILDREN AND TREES

Three years ago we assumed stewardship of the former park greenhouse area to redevelop it as the Gateway Greenhouse Education Center (GGEC). Our facility includes the greenhouse, some out structures, a suite of classrooms, an office, and a fenced in compound for the storage and stewardship of over 4000 trees and shrubs. The greenhouse is in Floyd Bennett Field’s future education district, surrounded by former military structures that will be recycled as a learning center within the park.

GGEC is providing educational opportunities and information to New Yorkers on land stewardship while supplying native plants for all units of Gateway National Recreation Area and other urban public spaces in our city. This project will also produce native trees and plants for a cutting-edge reforestation of a NYC landfill.

(<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/press/99-19pr.html>.)

We have also brought in thousands of school children to care for the plants that we are growing. Our program, which attracts mostly fifth and sixth graders and special education classes, includes a bit of plant biology, a lesson in the value of trees to an urban environment, and horticultural and non-horticultural activities within the park. Perhaps more importantly, the students, scout groups, Outward Bound groups etcetera, that have become regular visitors at the greenhouse, have learned about Gateway and Floyd Bennett Field, the largest park in under-parked Brooklyn. (http://www.treebranch.net/FoG_Gateway_Greenhse.htm).

EXPLORING NEW YORK’S “NATURAL” WATERFRONT

Although all waterfronts in NYC have been shaped by the hands of people, the edges of Jamaica Bay are slowly being brought back to a more naturalistic state, thanks to work by

NYC Department of Parks, Gateway National Recreation Area, and a host of partner government agencies. Friends of Gateway has been bringing both youth and adult groups to many of those waterfronts for a look at waterways without piers and seawalls, a short period of beach cleanup, and a lesson in how the water gets dirty. Adult groups have been visiting the Bay as part of the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition: Take a Walk, New York! program of health walks. (www.walkny.org) Youth groups have included scout troops and regular classes and have been hosted in partnership with the New York Soil and Water Conservation District.

BUILDING A STREET END PARK

With major support from the Kaplan Fund and Gateway National Recreation Area, Friends of Gateway has taken on a project that will add amenities to a piece of Floyd Bennett shorefront that is utilized primarily by fisher people and their families. When we are through, trees will be planted to provide shade in a few years, berries will be growing there to provide food for birds and children, environmental game courts will be painted on a section of pavement, and picnic tables, shade structures, and other amenities will be added to encourage family outings at this picturesque location in sight of the Marine Parkway Bridge. For its part, the Park has just installed a new bathroom facility just up the road. American Express has arranged a company outing to repair a chain link fence so that it can hold a new “trellis-load” of Virginia creeper vine. We are looking for a volunteer group to build a new stairway to the beach and to help with other small projects at this location. Friends of Gateway is working with partners to improve our National Park, one project at a time. To volunteer your group, call Toby at 212-228-3126.

CELEBRATING FLOYD BENNETT'S HISTORY

Working with the National Park Service, Floyd Bennett Field Task Force (FBTF), a group that highlights the Park's important WW2 history, and with the Historic Aircraft Restoration Project, a volunteer driven Park project which has now accumulated a hangar full of antique aircraft, we have begun to outreach to school groups to offer site visits and teach about the important role that the former airport has played in the history of aviation.

In addition to hosting many of the pioneers of aviation, Floyd Bennett Field was the launching point for many of the brand new aircraft that fought and won the war against Japan. Flying planes that just came off the assembly line was a risky venture, and some of the pilots who took on the task did not make it to their Pacific destinations.

According to Jim Van Westering, who heads the FBTF, balancing the need to preserve the Park's historic infrastructure with the desire to build a lively place for people and critters is what makes work at the Floyd Bennett so interesting. He believes that Friends of Gateway is positioned to take a lead role in that discussion. The FBTF, working with the National Park Service (NPS), has designed a “Teaching with Historic Places” curriculum, which is now on the NPS web site. About TWHP: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/about.htm>, FBF lesson plan: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/120floyd/index.htm>.

HELP BRING YOUR CHILD'S DAY CAMP TO GATEWAY

There are a limited number of opportunities to bring summer day camps for a fun day that includes “work” at the Gateway Greenhouse Education Center, a hike in a waterfront urban

wilderness, a barbeque picnic and sports opportunities, and perhaps a visit to see and touch historic aircraft. We have sent a notice to NYC day camp managers to inform them about this new opportunity for a day at a National Park. If you are a parent, teacher, or day camp councilor and would like to take advantage of this program, you can be our ambassador. Call Toby or Lenore for more information: 212-228-3126.

**AS FoG WORKS TO IMPROVE THE PARK,
AGENCIES & ENVIRONMENTALISTS TEAM UP TO IMPROVE THE BAY**

Even before the Jamaica Bay Ecowatchers reported on the disappearing islands of Jamaica Bay, significantly increased attention to the needs of NYC's "natural" estuary was well underway. Governmental agencies that have an interest in the quality of its environment have been reporting on restoration plans at quarterly meetings of the Jamaica Bay Task Force.

Considering the Bay's location and history and the various schemes to develop it, it is a wonder that this remnant of soft waterfront exists at all. The current critical mass of governmental attention, including funds from federal, state, and local sources and a host of government agencies is a modern miracle. We see this place finally becoming that urban Yosemite, host to millions of visitors, including sports enthusiasts, students of history, environmentalists, and school children.

Now that you've read about the Gateway history and happenings, jump back to the first paragraph, join us at our fundraising party, and meet some of the National Park people working with us to accomplish the dream.

TAKE A WALK, NEW YORK!

Saturday, June 18, 2005. 10 AM. Montefiore Family Health Walk, Bronx. We will join with Montefiore Medical Center to do a festive health walk through the Bronx, a kickoff to Bronx Week. We will walk through Van Cortlandt Park, across Mosholu Parkway to the Botanical Garden and on to the Zoo. Walkers will get free entry to the Zoo at the end of the walk. Meet at Van Cortlandt Park; take the 1/9 train to the last stop, 242nd St. Look for sign-up table inside the entrance to the Park; sign-up starts at 9:30 AM. Bring water and snacks.

URBAN OUTDOORS is the monthly newsletter of Neighborhood Open Space Coalition and Friends of Gateway. It reports on citywide public space issues and the work of hundreds of local civic groups that take an interest in the spaces. You have been added to the list because someone has entered your name. To be removed from the list "reply" with "remove" in the subject header. To add someone to URBAN OUTDOORS list: visit the subscription area of <http://www.treebranch.net/>.

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