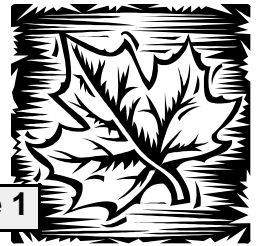


Earth Crew Summer '96 Report

A Project of West Harlem Environmental ACTION, Inc.

Fall 1996

Volume 1 Issue 1



Earth Crew Completes 125th St. Oasis

On Wednesday August 14th, West Harlem Environmental ACTION's youth leadership/community service project, Earth Crew, were honored during the Opening Day Ceremonies of The 125th Street Oasis. The Oasis project, which was led by WHE-ACT, was co-sponsored by The 125th Street Business Improvement District (BID), Council on the Environment of New York City, The Abrons Foundation, and Councilwoman C. Virginia Fields. The Earth Crew interns were largely responsible for the successful transformation of an abandoned public space, which was used as a local dump and toilet, into a beautifully landscaped Oasis, where the public can enjoy a natural setting while eating, reading or just resting their weary feet.

The Earth Crew began the transformation process in the fall of 1995 and completed the process two weeks before the opening event. However, there were many steps that



Earth Crew Interns sitting in front of WHE-ACT's Executive Director, Peggy Shepard (in white), Board of Directors Co-Chair Vernice Miller (sunglasses), The 125th Street BID's Barbara Askins (floral dress), Councilwoman C. Virginia Fields (hat), and invited guests, while waiting for the Oasis to officially open.

"These days neighborhood Heroes are hard to come by, but the youngsters pictured here . . . believed enough in their community and themselves to want to make it a better place."

-The Harlem Resident

the Earth Crew had to take in order to arrive at the ultimate goal. These steps included cleaning the garbage out of the planters, weeding, arranging, and planting the flowers, shrubs, bushes, and trees. Of Course, some of these steps required the floral expertise provided by Lenny Librizzi, from

(Continued on page 2 see OASIS)

Letter Writing Campaign to Giuliani Against Cuts to Recycling Program

In response to Mayor Giuliani's proposed cuts to the Recycling Program, the Earth Crew held a community letter writing campaign against the cuts.

According to the Mayor's proposed plan, recyclable material will not be picked up once per week, as currently established, but will be picked up once every other week. Not only would this cut produce community eye-sores, large piles of recyclable material waiting to

be picked up, but it may also result in community nose-sores, large *smelly* piles waiting to be picked up.

Another disturbing aspect of the cuts seems to be the targeting of communities of color by these cuts. The cuts would affect communities north of 96th Street in Manhattan, along with other communities of color in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens.

All told, the Earth Crew collected over 750 letters against the cuts and plans on hand-delivering the letters to

inside...

Landmark Air Quality Monitoring Project in Harlem page 2

Water Sampling done on the Hudson page 2

Earth Crew members co-facilitate workshop at Environmental Conference page 3

Clean-up at Grant Housing Projects page 3

Landmark Air Quality Monitoring in Harlem

At the behest of WHE-ACT, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began a landmark air quality monitoring study, in which the EPA placed eight air monitoring devices in strategic locations throughout Northern Manhattan this past summer.

One of the EPA's devices was placed near an elementary school across the street from the Manhattanville Bus Depot, a particularly significant siting because air pollution is suspected as one of the prime causes of Asthma, a deadly disease for both adults and children. In an example of environmental racism, 6 out of 7 Manhattan MTA bus depots are in Harlem. The number of deaths from Asthma in Harlem is running five times higher than the overall New York City rate, itself the highest in the country.

However, these monitors were placed on lampposts at an average height of twelve feet. It was suggested that another study should be done that would coincide with the EPA study, but would measure air pollution at street level and count the number of diesel burning trucks & buses, cars and pedestrians that passed by the devices in order to determine the level of exposure that pedestrians deal with on a daily basis.

This is where the Earth Crew come into the story. Under the direction of Columbia School of Public Health's Patrick Kinney, Ph.D., and The Harlem Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention's Mary Northridge, Ph.D., and WHE-ACT's executive director, Peggy Shepard, the Earth Crew spent five 8 hour days, sitting at four of the eight EPA sites, conducting traffic counts and wearing Personal Air Monitors designed to measure the level of PM₁₀. (Particulate Matter smaller than 10 microns in diameter) pollution in the air.

Why PM₁₀? Because this matter is small enough to evade the body's natural defense mechanisms, and can become imbedded in a person's lungs, which can result in Asthma, Emphysema, or other respiratory

illness'.

The Earth Crew interns displayed a surprisingly high level of commitment to the air monitoring project, considering the fact that they would be sitting in the same place for eight hours a day. The study seemed to catch their interest because of the fact that a project of this importance had never been done in Harlem before, and they

In an example of environmental racism, six out of seven Manhattan MTA bus depots are located in Harlem.

realized that their role in the study was extremely important to the successful completion and outcome of the study.

The Earth Crew received a lot of publicity because of their involvement in the project. In fact, two of our young people, Marché and Joselito were featured on a segment of a cable show
(Continued on page 4 see AIR)

(OASIS Continued from page 1)

Council on the Environment. Cornell Cooperative Extension provided the technical expertise with the open-air performance stage that was built by the interns.

The day of the Opening Event was hectic, but satisfying nonetheless. The craziness began with the last minute preparations and decorations to the Oasis and ended when the host, Cecil D. Corbin-Mark, Program Director of WHE-ACT, officially declared the space open to the public.

The program for the event consisted of speeches by the parties involved in making the Oasis a reality, an award/recognition ceremony for all of the Earth Crew interns and those who helped with the completion of the project, and ending with singing and dancing performances by the likes of June Gardner and The Uptown Dance Academy.

The event was a success, but the sweetest success came when community residents congratulated the young people on a job well done and The Harlem Resident referred to them as "Neighborhood Heroes".

Water Sampling done on the Hudson -Testing for signs of Raw Sewage

Water sampling in the Hudson River was made possible by a ride on the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, a replica of the Sloops that commonly brought supplies and mail, to and from Albany in the 1800's.

The Clearwater allowed us to sample at 11 strategic sites along the Hudson, beginning at Chelsea Piers (23rd St.) and ending by the North River Sewage Treatment Plant (135th St.). Samples were collected at depth via the use of a device that enabled us to trap a sample and place it in a collection bottle. Richard Grant, an environmental engineer, assisted WHE-ACT with this project and the Earth Crew helped Mr. Grant collect the samples.

Water sampling in the Hudson

became necessary by a 25 million gallon shortfall in the flow of raw sewage through the North River Sewage Treatment Plant. The samples were taken to test for the presence of Ecoli bacteria, which would indicate the presence of raw sewage in the river.

However, the trip on the Clearwater was not all work. The Earth Crew also enjoyed an educational program provided by the Educator, Anne-Marie and the crew. They learned about the history of Sloops on the Hudson River, indigenous species of life, and the adverse effects of pollution on this life. The Earth Crew helped to cast a troll net to catch examples of the indigenous life, but unfortunately they came up empty

(Continued on page 4 see WATER)

Earth Crew Facilitate Conference Workshop

The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYCEJA) held its Second Annual youth conference: "Youth, Environmental Justice & Sustainability" in early August. According to Michelle DePass, Executive Director of NYCEJA, "Over one hundred and fifty youth from over twenty community based organizations attended this conference".

Angela Park, from the President's Council on Sustainable Development delivered the keynote speech. In her speech, Ms. Park spoke of the need of grassroot community groups to gear themselves for the future so that they may continue to grow.

Earth Crew members, Marché Barnes and Joselito Melendez, co-facilitated, along with Julie Sze of NYCEJA, a workshop that dealt with transportation issues.

Many facts were given the workshop participants in order to get them involved in the workshop. Some of the facts were: the Montgomery Bus

Voter Registration Drive sparked after visit by ROCK THE VOTE

After a visit by ROCK THE VOTE interns, the Earth Crew decided to hold a voter registration drive. However, it was not all that easy.

It turned out that quite a few of the Earth Crew were disillusioned with the system and believed that voting was a meaningless action that often resulted in nothing being accomplished except keeping the status quo. They felt that voting was a waste of time, and not worth the effort.

The ROCK THE VOTE representative then decided to break it down for the interns of the Earth Crew. A list made up of topics such as Education, Employment, Health Care, Housing and Food was drawn up by the rep. and she then asked the Earth Crew if each topic was a right or a privilege. The only one categorized as a right, by the Earth Crew, was Education. The others were seen as

privileges because that is how they felt the rest of the country viewed the topics. The earth Crew did state that most, if not all, should be rights in this country.

The representative then went on to talk about the historic struggle, by women and all people of color, to gain the right to vote in this country. She told the story of the three civil-rights workers, two white men from New York and one southern black man, who were murdered and dumped into a river in Mississippi because they were trying to register poor southern blacks who had been historically denied these rights by Jim Crow laws.

After the visit, a few days were set aside to register community residents and non-residents to vote. Although the Earth Crew only registered 25 people, that means that 25 more votes will be cast this fall election season.

"Your participation was key to the success of this conference. I hope to work with you again in the future."

-Michelle DePass (NYCEJA)

Boycott started the modern civil rights movement, 60,000 premature deaths in the U.S. are related to particulate/soot pollution, diesel burning trucks, buses and cars are the largest source of soot pollution in NYC, 6 out of 7 bus depots in Manhattan are located north of 96th St., and Asthma rates in Harlem are triple the NYC average.

The workshop then continued with a twenty minute presentation of the Earth Crew's involvement in the Air Quality Monitoring Project. The presentation was made by Marché and Joselito. Before they began describing the details of the project, they spoke on

(Continued on page 4 see CONFERENCE)

Clean-up at Grant Houses Appreciated by Management & Residents

Some of the Earth Crew interns happen to live in the General Grant Housing Projects located on 125th street. So, when the project to assist in making the Grant Community a little cleaner, it was met by some surprising resistance by those that lived there and by those who new people who lived there.

Fortunately, the sense of civic responsibility to serve the community (and to receive a full paycheck) won out over the dissenters.

For two consecutive days, the Earth Crew picked up garbage that was strewn across the lawn of the particular area assigned to us, raked up leaves and deposited those leaves and other biodegradable materials into the recently

opened composting unit of Grant Houses.

With many grumbles and complaints, the work was completed and the Earth Crew was glad to be finished. The earth Crew began to feel much better about the work that they did after a few of the building residents complemented them on their work and stated that it was "good to see the young people working to make this place cleaner."

The Earth crew also received a letter from Ms. Carol Cross, manager of Grant Houses, thanking the Earth Crew for their work. Ms. Cross was pleased with the work and stated that "If Grant Houses can be of assistance again, please contact me. We like being someone's project".

(WATER Continued from page 2)

handed. Good thing Anne-Marie had some examples already waiting to be scrutinized.

One of the hardest parts of the trip, occurred in the beginning when the Earth Crew had to hoist a 5,000 pound. sail in order to help get the Clearwater into its quieter sailing mode versus having to use the motor to get around. As daunting a task as it was, the Earth Crew managed to pull it off, with a little verbal help from the members of the ships crew.

The Earth Crew taped the excursion, thanks to S-VHS cameras borrowed from Manhattan Neighborhood Network, and plan on producing and airing a special show on MNN about the experience on the Clearwater and the results of the sampling sometime this fall.



The Oasis as it looks when not crowded. The tables were built by the Earth Crew and the umbrellas have the WHE-ACT & 125th St. BID's logos on them.

(CONFERENCE Continued from page 3)

the detrimental health effects of diesel/soot pollution. Next they described the procedures of the project in detail, and had one of the post-doctoral students, Monesha Answam, from the Columbia School of Public Health, who assisted the Earth Crew on the project, demonstrate a personal Air Monitor to the workshop participants. The next step was to involve the participants in an interactive activity, which called for the participants to go down to the nearest street corner and conduct a live traffic count so that they may understand and appreciate the effort that went into completing the project.

Overall, the workshop seemed to be quite successful and informative to everyone in attendance, even Ms. Park from the Presidents Council attended and participated in our workshop. NYCEJA's Executive Director, Michelle DePass, sent us a letter congratulating us on our successful workshop and thanked us for helping to make the overall Conference a success.



The Earth Crew hard at work trying to register everyone that came by.

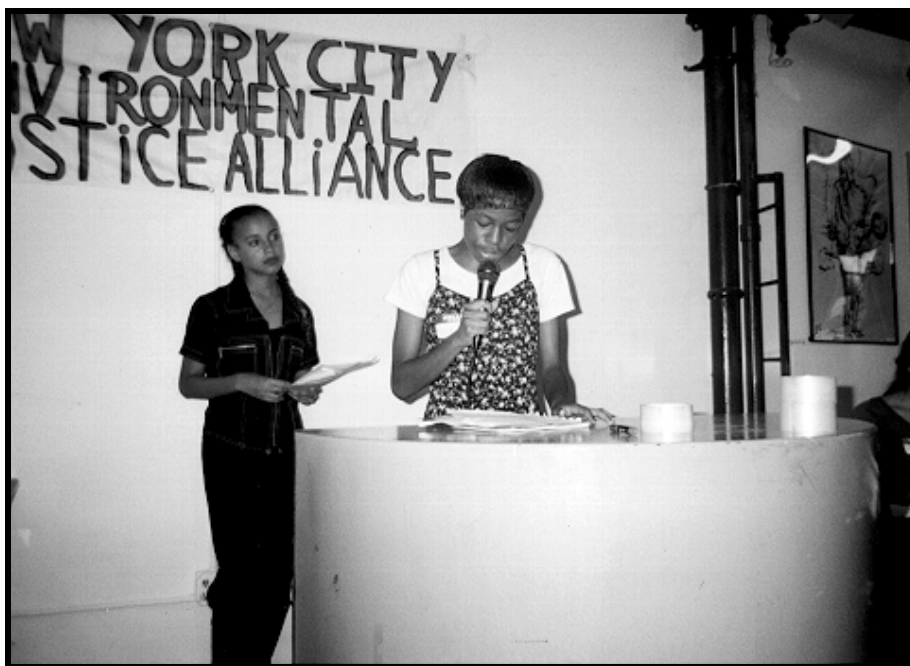
(AIR Continued from page 2)

called "Justice Factory". The show, which airs on CourtTv, focused on environmental issues. WHE-ACT has the show on tape.

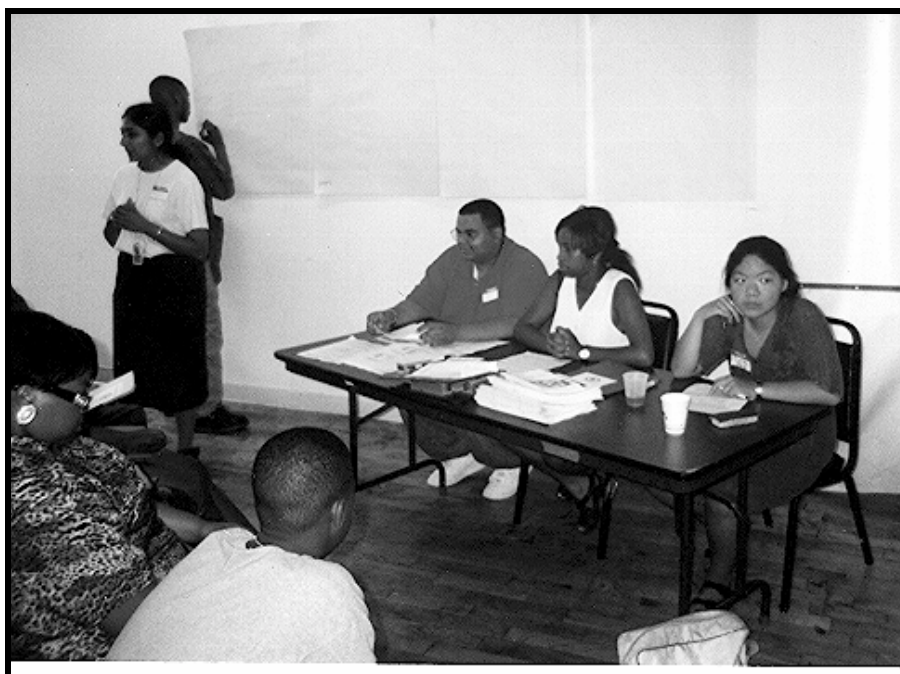
Overall, the experience of participating in a landmark study, was memorable and will hopefully result in the conversion of the NYCTA's bus fleet to cleaner burning fuels such as Natural Gas.

Trip to Philadelphia Zoo & August Wilson's "Seven Guitars"

As a reward for all of the hard work done by the Earth Crew this past summer, a trip to the Philadelphia Zoo was planned at their request. The zoo was fun and everyone seemed to enjoy it, but probably not as much as the visit to the large local video arcade, Dave & Buster's. The young people also went to see August Wilson's "Seven Guitars" on a Saturday matinee. The show was incredible and the Earth Crew loved it.



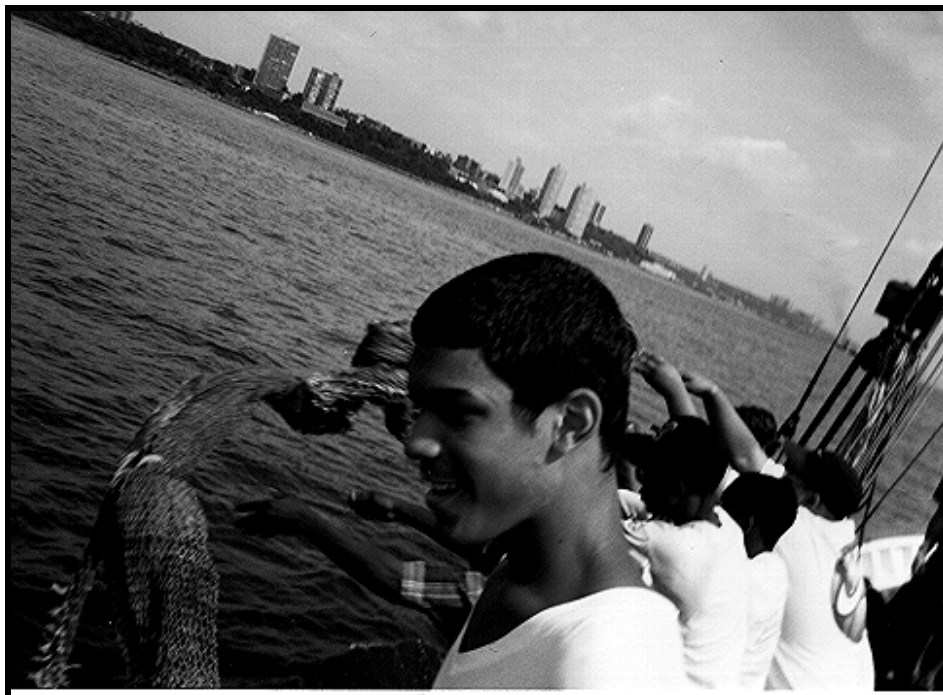
Felicia Reynolds, one of the Earth Crew interns, presenting herself and the Earth Crew to the community based groups at NYCEJA's conference



Earth Crew members Marché Barnes and Joselito Melendez, along with NYCEJA's Julie Sze present the workshop. Monesha (standing) demonstrates a Personal Air Monitor.



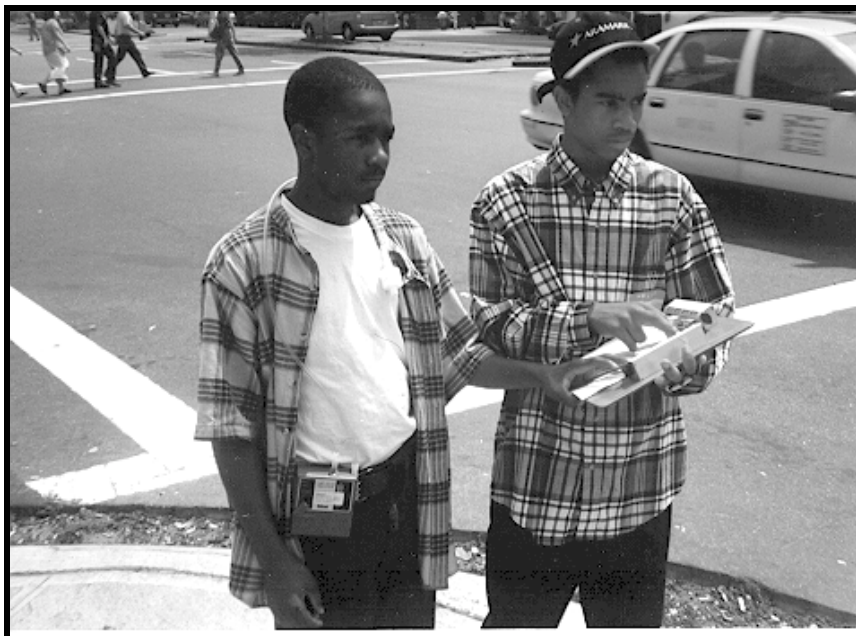
Earth Crew trying to hoist the main sail of the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater.



Earth crew casting the trawl net over the side of the Clearwater in hopes of catching some indigenous river life.



The Earth Crew gathered at the Philadelphia Zoo to see the residents of the zoo.



Earth Crew interns Carl Willis (white shirt) and Steven Nuñez conducting a traffic count and air monitoring. Carl has monitor on waist with filter around neck