



FOUNDATION

CASE STUDY

2008 AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE
COMMUNITY TREES

PROJECT AT A GLANCE

Location

Camden, New Jersey

Lead Partners

The New Jersey Tree Foundation
City of Camden

Award Category

Small City (population <100,000)

Timeframe

2002-2007 (ongoing)

Total Cost

\$1.1 million cash plus \$.4 million in-kind donations and volunteer labor for tree planting

Size and Scope

The New Jersey Tree Foundation has formed scores of partnerships with community groups throughout the City of Camden, engaged 4,600 volunteers, and planted almost 2,600 trees as of July 2007.

Outstanding Accomplishments

- Planted almost 2,600 trees
- Created 77 partnerships with neighborhood organizations
- Involved over 4,600 resident volunteers
- Planted trees in 18 of the City's 21 neighborhoods
- Educated public officials and residents on the multiple values of urban forestry
- Trained over 250 Camden residents of all ages in community forestry maintenance practices through TreeKeepers Workshops
- Developed and disseminated a Tree Planting Manual to guide those leading tree planting events
- Established the Camden Shade Tree Advisory Board
- Improved the City's bid specifications for tree plantings

Urban Airshed Reforestation Program The New Jersey Tree Foundation



The Urban Airshed Reforestation Program (UARP), initiated by The New Jersey Tree Foundation (NJTF), is designed to mitigate poor environmental conditions in the City of Camden through tree-planting and maintenance throughout all neighborhoods of the City. Located in a non-attainment area for ozone and burdened by the legacy of heavy industrial activity, Camden also suffers from the highest poverty rate in the State. Over 90% of its residents are African American or Hispanic. UARP's community forestry efforts, including its educational workshops for adults and teens, provide an opportunity for Camden residents to combat environmental injustices, beautify their neighborhoods, and improve their quality of life.

Through the planting of thousands of trees, the forging of partnerships with scores of community organizations, and the engagement of thousands of resident volunteers, UARP is helping to green Camden's infrastructure and bring visible, tangible improvements to City neighborhoods and parks. Moreover, the project has affirmed NJTF's philosophy that trees planted by residents, not for them, promotes environmental stewardship among residents and unifies communities. By locating tree plantings where partner organizations and residents request them, and by training hundreds of residents as TreeKeepers, UARP ensures the expanding urban forest will be cared for in the future, thereby enhancing the sustainability of the entire program. This project links tree planting in an urban environment to better air and water quality by providing a safer, healthier environment for residents most affected by industrial pollution. As of July 2007, almost 2,600 trees had been planted throughout Camden with over 4,600 volunteers participating.



FOUNDATION

CASE STUDY

2008 AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE
COMMUNITY TREES

Project Description

Pre-Existing Conditions

As one of New Jersey's most densely populated communities, Camden is the home to about 80,000 residents, 90% of whom are African American or Hispanic. Some 44% of the City's population lives below the federal poverty level as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Historically an industrial port, Camden has experienced decades of industrial decline and environmental degradation. The City's economic decline has led to the deterioration of its once impressive park system and an urban tree canopy of less than 25%. This contributes to the urban heat island effect in which surface temperatures in Camden can be several degrees higher than in surrounding suburbs. The City and the surrounding region have ground-level ozone levels above federal ambient air quality standards, with residents suffering from disproportionately high levels of asthma and other respiratory ailments. The combination of these demographic, environmental, and health conditions means that Camden is truly an environmental justice community.

Prior to UARP, there was no municipal agency or local organization responsible for reforesting the City's lost forest canopy. Moreover, there was no City budget for tree planting, removal, or maintenance. Beginning in 2002, Future Camden, the City's first Master Plan in 24 years, laid out a vision for improving environmental conditions by establishing a greenway system, developing and maintaining a diversified City-wide open space network, cleaning-up contaminated areas, and other measures. Supported by state legislation aimed at encouraging development and capital investment in Camden and other qualified communities, numerous green infrastructure improvements have been made, including landscaping of an historic square, restoration of two City parks, and the development of the Environmental Mitigation and Landscape Master Plan for the Waterfront South neighborhood.

The Camden Strategic Revitalization Plan and the Capital Improvement and Infrastructure Master Plan, developed in 2003, provide a blueprint for infrastructure improvements in the City, including detailed park and open space rehabilitation as well as neighborhood beautification projects. Though the redevelopment process has begun, urban revitalization is a slow process. UARP tree plantings have been informed by and compliment these efforts, providing immediate and visible improvements to Camden's neighborhoods.

Project Components

Purpose: The overall purpose of UARP is to engage residents and community groups throughout the City of Camden to plant thousands of trees in order to mitigate air and water pollution and improve neighborhood livability.

Process: UARP is a community-driven reforestation program. The NJTF's approach involves residents in every step of the process, from site selection to tree maintenance. Twice per year, the NJTF invites applications for tree plantings. Interested residents and community groups complete applications requesting a tree planting and attend an Applicants' Meeting where they receive educational materials and outreach training. Applicants are responsible for promoting the tree planting project in their neighborhood. Each resident who wants a tree signs an agreement that they will help plant and maintain the block's trees for at least two years. All trees are planted by residents and/or volunteers. UARP tree plantings take place roughly 24 Saturdays each year, during the Spring and Fall planting seasons. Almost 2,600 trees have been planted since 2002; 65% are indigenous species.



PROJECT GOALS

- Plant thousands of trees in the City of Camden to mitigate air and water pollution
- Recruit residents and community organizations to "plant the right tree in the right way in the right place" in all City neighborhoods
- Provide residents and municipal employees with rigorous training in all aspects of urban forestry and tree maintenance
- Assist the Camden Shade Tree Advisory Board in overseeing the new trees and shaping the urban redevelopment process
- Assist the Advisory Board and the City in developing a five-year Community Forestry Management Plan and a tree ordinance to protect public trees during redevelopment
- Quantify the environmental, energy, and economic benefits of UARP in Camden using the U.S. Forest Service's i-Tree software



FOUNDATION

CASE STUDY

2008 AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE
COMMUNITY TREES

Outreach: The NJTF staff regularly attends community meetings, fairs, and neighborhood redevelopment meetings where they distribute UARP information and applications. Much of the outreach is performed by Camden residents and officials who have participated in tree planting events, Camden TreeKeepers workshops, or a UARP informational meeting. The UARP's community partners also make tree planting applications available to local residents. Staff from the NJTF volunteer for Camden Greenways projects and Camden Children's Garden events. For the past several years, NJTF staff have presented the accomplishments of the UARP to the Camden City Council and have showcased the Program's successes to tree experts from across the state at the annual NJ Shade Tree Federating meeting.

Benefits

Community and Economic Benefits

Economic Vitality: UARP complements the larger Camden Strategic Revitalization Plan and the Capital Improvement and Infrastructure Master Plan. These plans reflect the City's recognition that improving green infrastructure is critical to the economic viability and livability of neighborhoods. To date, historic Yorkship Square has been redesigned and landscaped and several parks have been restored, including Johnson park and Roosevelt Plaza in Camden's Business District.

Citizen Engagement: Over 4,600 resident volunteers have participated in tree plantings. This involvement has enhanced neighborhood pride and empowerment and encouraged residents to lobby local officials for street repairs, more open green space, and street lights. Partnerships with local churches and housing organizations have resulted in tree plantings at these community facilities and at low-income housing developments. In addition, the NJTF has hired and trained Camden youth for summer jobs as junior foresters.

Education: In addition to its general outreach, UARP educational efforts start with mandatory Applicant Meetings held twice a year. At these meetings tree planting applicants receive educational materials and training. As a mechanism to ensure the long-term health of the City's urban forest, the NJTF offers the Camden TreeKeepers and Junior TreeKeepers Workshop series to train residents in tree biology, hazard recognition, and maintenance. NJTF has also provided scholarships to residents and city workers for state-required training under the Shade Tree and Community Forestry Act. In addition, UARP has developed a set of written materials to guide planting and maintenance, including the Camden Tree Planting Training Manual, UARP Information Sheet, Tree Care Sheet, Sample Tree Planting Announcement, and Sample TreeKeepers Workshop Invitation. Most are available in English and Spanish.

Funding

The UARP was spawned by a 2002 enforcement settlement between the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and an electric utility (Conectiv Atlantic Generation, Inc.) that had violated regulatory limits for nitrogen oxides air emissions. As part of the settlement, the utility agreed to pay \$1 million for an urban reforestation project in the affected airshed that, according to DEP, would not only improve air quality but also improve the quality of life in urban neighborhoods. With the recognition that trees absorb and reduce levels of ozone, nitrogen dioxide, and other pollutants, the innovative enforcement action, known as a "supplemental environmental project," ultimately funded NJTF's UARP efforts through 2007.

NJTF used the initial grant from the NJ DEP settlement to leverage an additional \$106,000 in grants and cash donations from public and private entities and over \$100,000 of in-kind contributions from partner organizations. In addition, volunteer involvement in the tree planting program through July 2007 is estimated to be worth over \$300,000. Since the Spring of 2007, NJTF has secured additional funding to allow the program to continue. Primary donors to date include: NJ DEP Community Forestry Program's Cool Cities Initiative (\$125,000 annually for two years), the William Penn Foundation (\$55,000), the Ford Foundation (\$50,000), NJ DEP Air Toxics Program (\$15,000), National Tree Trust - Roots Grant (\$25,000), and a number of local businesses.

MEASURABLE BENEFITS

As of mid-2007, UARP had not completed the quantification of the environmental benefits of the approximately 2,600 trees it had planted. However, this remains a key goal of the project and UARP plans to use the U.S. Forest Service's i-Tree software to calculate the value of annual environmental and aesthetic benefits such as energy conservation, air quality improvement, CO₂ reduction, storm water control, and property value increases.



FOUNDATION

CASE STUDY

2008 AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE
COMMUNITY TREES

“The tree work has brought neighbors together for a common cause and has spruced up areas that have been unkempt for years.”

- Resident and member of the Camden Shade Tree Advisory Board

“The redevelopment process has begun in Camden but urban revitalization is a slow process and few visible improvements can be seen in the city. Planting trees through the UARP provides obvious, tangible, and immediate positive change for residents who have made Camden their home. The UARP has provided a glimmer of hope to residents long accustomed to despair and -dilapidation.”

- City Counselor and active UARP participant

Contacts

New Jersey Tree Foundation

Elise Schadler
Program Director
Urban Airshed Restoration Program
(609) 633-7584
elise.schadler@newjerseytreefoundation.org



Looking Ahead

Project Monitoring and Evaluation

NJTf monitors the health of the trees planted in the UARP. As of mid-2007, UARP had less than an 8% tree mortality rate, which is considered low for urban plantings. The NJTF will use i-Tree software to update the Program’s value in terms of annual environmental benefits and property value impacts.

Project Maintenance

NJTf’s philosophy that “trees planted by residents, not for them, promotes environmental stewardship and unifies communities” is at the core of UARP’s success in maintaining Camden’s growing urban forest. Sites for tree planting are identified by community residents and neighborhood organizations. All trees in the UARP are planted by residents and volunteers, and the application process requires applications to commit in writing to maintaining the trees they plant for at least two years. Long-term maintenance is promoted by TreeKeeper workshops that train residents, municipal employees, and others in a broad range of urban forestry management practices as well as the establishment of the Shade Tree Advisory Board.

Challenges Faced

The positive publicity generated since the project’s initiation in 2002 has resulted in a wait-list in applications for tree plantings each year. Resource constraints limit the number of plantings that can be completed in a season. Moreover, the City’s lack of funding to maintain the existing urban forest, including hazardous trees, is a concern to NJTF. When the City’s Five-Year Community Forestry Management Plan is approved by the state, Camden will be eligible for state funding to address hazardous trees. In addition, some trees planted by UARP have been threatened by redevelopment projects. NJTF has worked to head off such threats by partnering with Camden redevelopment agencies and project development consultants.

Innovation Applied

Among several innovations applied in UARP, three are especially noteworthy: (1) Initial funding for UARP resulted from the settlement of an environmental enforcement case, turning an historic environmental insult into a long-term community asset. (2) Residents play a central role in directing the entire tree planting program, including the selection of sites. (3) UARP forged deep and extensive local partnerships, including with local government. These close ties have resulted in active participation by local elected officials in neighborhood tree plantings, development of a Community Forestry Management Plan, establishment of the Shade Tree Advisory Board, and modification in the City’s bid specifications for tree planting.