

NEW YORK RELEAF: HOW IT HAPPENED

A Brief History of Urban Forestry in the United States and the Creation of the New York State Program

PART 2 of 2

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INTRODUCTION: CONCLUSION OF PART 1, PUBLISHED IN JUNE 2020

NEW YORK RELEAF: HOW IT HAPPENED PART 1 was concluded in June, 2020. It was posted permanently on the “About” page of the New York State Urban Forestry Council (NYSUFC) website and then publicized by a variety of means including through the Council blog and *Taking Root*, the Council’s digital newsletter, through social media, and by *DEC Delivers*, the digital newsletter of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC).

The final paragraphs of Part 1 narrated how "real" money finally came to the NYSDEC:

Sustainable funding for the Forest Service's urban forestry effort finally appeared in the Fiscal Year 1992 Budget as part of the Farm Bill. After many, many years of limited regular budget funds and earmarks for various pet projects, the program exploded, as so often happens, due to personal connections and a special visit.

Dallas Parks Foundation, founded in 1982 (now known as Texas Trees Foundation) had become part of the national network of “tree groups,” and its work was seen as important to the mix of projects being done across the country,

But this non-profit, as opposed to the others, had a secret weapon: the Chair of its Board was Trammell Crow, a wealthy Texas businessman and a close friend of President George H. W. Bush. President Bush, who was inaugurated in January, 1989, had already expressed interest in a greener nation and Mr. Crow, who loved trees, had encouraged him to create a program that would celebrate his vision.

As staff of the Parks Foundation related to the tree groups at the time, Trammell Crow invited President Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush to meet with them to discuss details of what was happening locally and nationally and to press forward with support for his vision of planting more trees.

The Bushes heard the story—and were impressed. They decided they would sponsor a program to be called America the Beautiful that would help transform and green the thousands of cities, towns, and villages across the country. This became a game changer, as the U.S. Forest Service would soon learn. Their paltry \$2.7 million budget in 1990 became \$21.2 million in Fiscal Year 1991.

"Real" money had come at last; NYSDEC received \$500,000 from the new budget and was able to create its own expanded Urban and Community Forestry program beginning in 1992.

1992-PRESENT: DEC EXPANDS ITS URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY STAFF, USING FEDERAL GUIDELINES

The increased U.S. Forest Service funding of Fiscal Year 1991 had been applauded by many national and local groups that were active in urban forestry. The Forest Service was collaborating regularly with American Forests, a national non-profit that had helped coordinate the first two national urban forestry conferences (in 1978 and 1982). At a meeting in Washington, D.C., a group assembled to discuss how more funding would allow the expansion of work done by states and their localities thus far. Nancy Wolf, representing Environmental Action Coalition in New York City (EAC), which had partnered with DEC for several years, was invited to be part of the group.

All participants agreed that the state agencies would take the lead and the program in each state would be directed by a full-time Urban Forestry Coordinator. Each state would begin to roll out the program as it saw fit, while the Forest Service would supervise, advise, and assist.

Representatives from non-profit organizations, such as American Forests, EAC, and the emerging national network of tree groups, were adamant that a strong connection be made to the grassroots volunteers and local organizations that had created the urban forestry program in so many ways. They reminded the assembled participants that much of the advocacy that had brought attention and funding had come from their efforts across the country. It was important, they thought, that this be a recognized part of the building of the structure. After much debate, it was decided to recommend that each state have a fulltime paid "Volunteer Coordinator" or similar title to help lead the program. This person was not assumed to be a forester, but someone with outreach, project coordination, and volunteer recruitment skills.

In addition, the group recommended that each state agency establish an urban forestry council of natural resources professionals and committed volunteers that would advise, assist, and become an adjunct to the state-run program. Each state would be left to create its council in its own way.

As a result of the negotiations, when DEC received the notice of expanded funding, it also received instructions and recommendations as to how the program would go forward. It was easy

for the agency to expand its urban forestry program via its forestry staff, as it had already begun this type of work in many of its regions.

To its great credit, DEC planners used the three components as a guide. New York ReLeaf was chosen as the name of the community outreach portion, building on the Global ReLeaf name that was already well-known. (Global ReLeaf was a worldwide program created by American Forests, which did not copyright the word ReLeaf, thus making it available to all.) In addition to New York State, other states adopted the ReLeaf designation; one of the most prominent is California ReLeaf. New York ReLeaf described its program as both urban and community forestry, in deference to the many small communities upstate that did not think of themselves as “urban.” Thus, from the beginning, New York ReLeaf was active in villages, townships, and cities of all sizes.

It is important to understand that DEC's urban forestry program has grown substantially beyond its original structure and includes many components. The name New York ReLeaf is used for its outreach via regional workshops and the annual conference. Foresters and others are engaged in many other aspects of the management of the state's lands and forests and have created strong, robust urban forestry work. The consistent support and enthusiasm of this leadership has helped the DEC urban and community forestry staff build a successful program.

In the early 1990s, DEC's forestry program was led by Director of the Division of Lands and Forests (also known as State Forester) Norman Van Valkenburgh, Assistant Director Robert Bathrick, and Lands and Forests Bureau Chief for Forest Management Daniel (Dan) Weller. During the succeeding years, the program was led by State Foresters Robert Bathrick, Frank Dunstan (not known as State Forester, as he did not have a forestry degree) and Robert Davies, who retired in the spring of 2022.

Assistant Directors were James (Jim) Beil (who was State Forester while Frank Dunstan and Robert Davies were Division Directors), Francis Sheehan and Peter Innes, who retired in November, 2021. Jeffrey Rider is the current Assistant Director.

Daniel Weller was followed by Michael Greason, Bruce Williamson, and the current Lands and Forests Bureau Chief for Forest Management, Robert Messenger. After Williamson retired, some bureaus were reorganized; urban and community forestry was added to the new Bureau of Forest Resource Management.

Along with the additional funding beginning in the early 1990s, the Forest Service created new regulations for how the money would be used. NYSDEC's program was supervised by Clyde Hunt (later Phillip Rodbell) and the late Sharon Ossenbruggen (later John Parry) from the Northeast Region of the Forest Service, with which DEC was already working on other forestry programs. After many years of dedicated service, John Parry retired in the summer of 2021; his 2022 successor is Danielle Gift.

With the infusion of significantly more funds in 1992, the existing urban forestry program could at last have substantial growth. The point person for expanding the program was State Urban Forestry Coordinator Peter Innes, who was already supervising projects in several regions. Now all regions would be expected to participate. Peter Innes was followed by Peter Frank from 1993 to 2003. Frank Dunstan followed Peter in that position. Later, Mary Kramarchyk (now Beck),

who had been hired in 2001 as the in-house Volunteer Coordinator (now Partnership Coordinator) followed Frank in that position until 2018, when Gloria Van Duyne became the Urban Forestry Coordinator.

Volunteer/Partnership Coordinators over the years included Sally Kellogg from 2012 until 2018, assisted by Mary Martin. Christina McLaughlin was chosen for that position in 2019.

1992-PRESENT: DEC'S PROGRAM IS LED BY DEDICATED IN-HOUSE URBAN FORESTRY COORDINATORS

Urban Forestry Coordinator Peter Innes, who had begun his career with DEC as a forester in Region 3 of the Hudson Valley remembers, "Urban forestry intrigued me. It was a new challenge. I was never going to be happy working in the woods every day like many traditional foresters. I came from a rural upstate village; working with cities was exciting. It became obvious that urban and community forestry was just beginning to realize its potential ... being part of the development and expansion of the program was rewarding."

Peter Innes led the way to the expansion of the regional work around the state and encouraged the foresters to take on urban and suburban work that many had not been involved in before. The training and advice coming from Albany and from university and Forest Service partners via the pre-existing network worked well and identified new opportunities for foresters around the state to work directly with communities. Peter served as the statewide Coordinator until 1993, when he became the Regional Forester for Region 4.

The next phase of the growing program was under the leadership of Peter Frank from 1993 through 2003, who had previously been a senior forester in Region 1 (Long Island). He was very familiar with urban and suburban forestry work and liked it. Peter gives praise to Regional Forester David Sinclair, who was very supportive as he supervised the early work of ReLeaf in Region 1.

Peter Frank reports that he was given quite a bit of autonomy in developing the program, which he liked. Given a hiatus in the Volunteer Coordinator position from 1996 until 2001, he was in many ways handling both jobs and he thoroughly enjoyed going around the state to the various regions and helping to facilitate local workshops and other activities. He says he felt "self-empowered" and encouraged the foresters in the various regions to adopt the same methodology as the program continued to grow.

Peter Frank was especially involved in work with the activities in New York City, which had one of the most robust ReLeaf programs. This included, as he remembers, helping to develop Green Horizons, an annual natural resources careers event for middle school students that is still going on today. Along with Bureau Chief Dan Weller, Peter Frank was deeply involved in the planning and execution of the national urban forestry conference, held in New York City in 1995.

Peter Frank's leadership was particularly important in the formalizing of the Urban and Community Forestry Council that was led by Professor Nina Bassuk of Cornell and had helped to organize statewide conferences while still an informal organization. He believed that the

Council would accomplish far more if it was more formally organized; eventually, it became a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization.

1992-PRESENT: DEC'S IN-HOUSE PROFESSIONAL URBAN FORESTRY STAFF CONTINUED TO EXECUTE A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Although each of the regions had forestry staff already, only a few had previously done urban forestry programming. Bureau Chief Dan Weller proclaimed that "every forester is an urban forester" but, eventually, those most suited to and interested in working directly in communities undertook most of the urban and community forestry work. As time went on, professional training and the wealth of information that developed in national and state conferences and local workshops gradually increased the knowledge of traditional foresters who worked closely with certified arborists who were more experienced in the species and techniques being recommended for planting in communities. The combination of the broader ecosystem education of the foresters and the more specific training of the arborists created a complex set of information that was greatly beneficial.

In addition to regular funding for the program's expansion, DEC received a one-time grant of \$35,000 to create publicity, educational material, and outreach. This was used during the first year of the program (1992) and allowed Peter Innes and Nancy Wolf, who had been contracted as the Volunteer Coordinator, to travel to every region to introduce the program personally. The funding also allowed a contract with Marc Breslav, a public relations consultant from Cold Spring, New York, whose Cornell natural science background had led him to focus his activities with environmental and like-minded non-profits around the state.

In May and June of 1992, in six of nine regions, Marc organized a media tour in conjunction with ReLeaf's networking meetings for grantees and other interested parties. At least nine television and ten radio stations carried interviews, as did a few newspapers. The key to this success was to localize and personalize offering in-studio interviews for TV and phone interviews for radio.

With Marc's help, the outreach across the state progressed, and regional foresters were generally welcoming as they assembled their staffs to hear about the program. The regions with most experience from work done in the previous decade were Region 1 in Long Island, Region 2 in New York City, Region 3 in the Hudson Valley, Ithaca and Syracuse in Region 7, and the southern end of Region 9 in Western New York. Region 9's Regional Forester Wayne Cooper (now retired) remembers that he and his peers were generally accepting, especially since they were pleased that the new program came with its own funding.

The foresters in charge of the regions who directed the expanded program in 1992 were:

Region 1 of Long Island: Regional Forester David Sinclair

Region 2 of New York City: Supervising Forester Laurel Remus

Region 3 of the Hudson Valley: Regional Forester Fred Gerty

Region 4 of the Catskills and Albany area: Regional Forester Carl Wiedemann

Region 5 of the Adirondacks: Regional Forester Thomas (Tom) Martin

Region 6 of Mohawk Valley/Tug Hill/ St. Lawrence Valley: Regional Forester David Smith

Region 7 of Central New York, Ithaca, and Syracuse: Regional Forester Chad Covey

Region 8 of the Finger Lakes and Rochester: Regional Forester Robert (Bob) Morrison

Region 9 of Western New York and Buffalo: Regional Forester Wayne Cooper

Many successful foresters were active in various components of the program in the following years, partnering with fellow professionals and community leaders. As of 2022, the following foresters were helping to lead the ReLeaf committees around the state:

Region 1: John Wernet

Region 2: Timothy Wenskus

Region 3: George Profous

Region 4: Currently inactive

Region 5: Jeffrey Speich (retired in spring, 2022)

Region 6: Michael Giocondo

Region 7: Andrew Goeller

Region 8: Gary Koplun

Region 9: Nate Morey

1992-PRESENT: DEC CREATES ITS VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR POSITION AND MAKES IT PERMANENT

But what was this "Volunteer Coordinator" idea and position? Who would do this job? What would the structure and tasks be?

At that point, Nancy Wolf received a call from Bureau Chief Dan Weller, who was aware of Environmental Action Coalition's long activity on both the national level and with DEC and others in the state. "We have to have something called Volunteer Coordinator. I assume you know what that is?" "Yes, of course!" "Would you like to do it?" "Yes!"

This was an amazing offer and EAC considered it an honor to be asked to become involved. For the next three years, Nancy Wolf and staff of EAC helped to create the program via yearly contracts between EAC and DEC. The work focused on the creation of communications documents and the establishment of ReLeaf planning committees in each region. Although not every region became successful in the early days, all eventually established committees, most of

which are functioning today. (Region 4 ReLeaf is not currently active, but DEC Urban and Community Forestry staff work on projects with Parks professionals and volunteers in Albany, Troy, and Schenectady.)

After Consulting Forester Bruce Robinson served as the Volunteer Coordinator during 1996, Urban Forestry Coordinator Peter Frank decided it was best to hire a permanent DEC Volunteer Coordinator for the success and longevity of the program. Nancy Wolf encouraged and supported this idea. Following a vacancy in the position, Mary Kramarchyk (now Beck) was hired and served from 2001 through 2018, as both Volunteer Coordinator (now known as Partnership Coordinator) and later as Urban Forestry Coordinator. Mary was a truly excellent choice; she built on and made the existing structure and program ever more visible and successful.

Mary recounts how she was chosen for the first in-house Volunteer Coordinator. In 2001, she was working in the DEC Commissioner of Natural Resources office, where she was seeing Peter Frank's regular requests to hire a new Volunteer Coordinator and kept bringing this request to her boss. She was greatly interested in the job and remembers the help of Division Director Frank Dunstan in securing an interview. For Mary and Peter Frank, it was a perfect match. Together, they re-expanded the program around the state. At the time, Mary recounts that the only active regions were Region 2 in New York City, Region 3 in the Hudson Valley, and Region 7 in Central New York.

Mary remembers that Peter let her have "free rein," which meant she soon developed connections in every region and gradually the program re-developed in areas where it had lapsed. In addition, Mary energized the annual Arbor Day program, with an official state poster and statewide school contests where young students submitted their own artwork under various themes. Each year's winner is honored at a Tree City Awards luncheon; in 2022, calendars were produced with artwork from 12 student winners.

Mary worked closely with the formalized New York State Urban Forestry Council, particularly in coordination for the yearly statewide conferences. In the beginning she remembers that the most enthusiastic regions were 1 (Long Island), 2 (NYC), 7 (Central New York), and 8 (Finger Lakes area.) Gradually, the statewide conferences came to be held sequentially in every region. Council leadership, DEC staff, and the relevant ReLeaf committees planned each conference together. The ReLeaf committees in each region have now taken the lead, working closely with DEC UCF Partnership Coordinator Christina McLaughlin.

Mary also enthusiastically attended the Forest Service regional meetings, representing New York State, and the annual national conferences, where she participated in various ways. Through her national work and statewide program, she created what she called the "together" program: regional workshops, Council newsletters, state conferences, training workshops, and education. After Mary became the Urban Forestry Coordinator, she was ably assisted by Sally Kellogg, the Partnership Coordinator from 2012 to 2018.

1991-1994: DEC SUCCESSFULLY USES THE NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS TREE PLANTING PROGRAM

An unusual federal program funded through the Small Business Administration (SBA) proved to be one of the best devices for recruiting regional and local partners as the expanded urban forestry program was launched. A pet project of Congressman Neal Smith of Iowa, who chaired the House of Representatives Small Business Committee, this "win-win-win" program benefited the environmental aspects of tree planting, the financial success of appropriate small businesses, and the structure of the emerging New York ReLeaf.

At its heart, the idea of the program was to support small businesses such as tree nurseries, arboricultural and landscape companies, and consulting professionals in the related fields. Funds were allocated to state forestry agencies based on population, so New York State received a generous portion.

The state methodology was clear: local communities in the various regions would apply for tree planting grants that would be chosen by DEC regional foresters. Then, money would be distributed from DEC's special funds via its partnership with Environmental Action Coalition, where Nancy Wolf worked as the Volunteer Coordinator. Per SBA's rules, the grant funds would be used to buy trees and pay for professional services from local nurseries and related companies. The funds needed to be matched 50-50 (some in-kind) by the applicants, and the grant money could also be used for planting and maintenance of the new trees.

DEC received over \$1 million of SBA funds in fiscal year 1991 and \$1.54 million in Fiscal Year 1992, just at the time when DEC and partners were expanding the urban forestry program across the state. The state eventually received approximately \$4 million during the years of the SBA program's existence. Peter Innes remembers it as the best possible assistance that the program could have had. Being able to arrive with promises of trees to be planted in local communities was a perfect way to attract partners and strengthen the program. He and the regional forestry staff also emphasized ongoing tree maintenance, which became a focus of many workshops and other training opportunities.

With Marc Breslav's help, the news of SBA-funded trees was broadly disseminated. For example, the June 5, 1992 edition of the *Elmira Star-Gazette* proudly announced local grants from the program: Village of Oswego, \$4,900 for planting 35 trees; Oswego Elementary School, \$1,050 for 8 trees to be planted on school grounds; \$1,235 for 10 trees for Van Etten; \$2,500 for 16 trees for Montour Falls; and \$1,964 for 48 trees for Savona. Most of these small communities had no tree planting budgets; now they received professionally grown, selected, and planted additions to beautify their public landscapes.

A successful project remembered by Andrew (Andy) Hillman, who was the City Arborist of the City of Oswego at that time, was planned and executed in 1992. Although exact records are not now available, Andy remembers that trees were bought from Ontario Orchards, which complied with the SBA rules, and the trees were planted in the new West Side Linear Park. Recent photos from Oswego City files show trees thriving in the park along the Oswego River.

Other successful projects were reported by Olean City Forester Susan (Sue) Cooper. The City of Olean was one of the first SBA applicants and received a grant of \$8,290 in 1991 for 22 trees that were bought from the well-known Schichtel's Nursery in Springville, New York. Olean received a second grant for 24 trees from the extra 1993 SBA funds—this time for \$3,500. The match was the purchase of tree grates by the City.

As Schichtel's began to sell SBA trees to a large number of localities (many of which are still buying trees regularly through a variety of funds), the Nursery became a major and loyal supporter of the ReLeaf program. Schichtel's arborist Jim Kisker eventually served on the NYSUFC Board.

Since state SBA funds were also allocated by population, large cities such as New York City received generous amounts for each grant period. The NYC agencies that received major funds included the Parks Department (DPR; now known more commonly as NYC Parks), the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). Gregory (Greg) Owens, who recently retired as DEC Senior Forester in Region 7, was the DEC Senior Forester in the City at the time. He recalls:

The SBA program provided me with an opportunity to engage with block associations, civic groups, housing advocates, and hundreds of other community-based organizations ... I worked with Keith Kriet of DPR to promote care and ownership of the newly planted trees by neighborhood residents. I sent letters to all 59 community boards, soliciting requests for street trees with the contingency that a local resident meet with me at the proposed planting site and participate in either a New York ReLeaf workshop or enroll in the Citizen Pruner class offered by the NYC Street Tree Consortium (now known as Trees New York.)

The response was overwhelming. During spring and summer 1992, I visited all five boroughs. While the visits were about the grant, they more often evolved into tree care sessions where I explained basics of watering, mulching, and protection of existing trees planted in the neighborhood. After applicants attended a workshop or became a Citizen Pruner, the proposed sites were included in DPR street tree planting contracts.

In 1994, I received a large package from Brother Paul Beaudin of St. Lucy Academy on East 104th Street. The SBA trees requested had finally been planted and all second, third, and fourth grade students wrote letters of thanks and sent glitter-flecked drawings. I still have them as a reminder of a hugely successful and personally satisfying project.

DEC made sure that the SBA funds were widely dispersed across the state and that hundreds of small, medium, and large municipalities received trees and expert advice, eagerly becoming part of the growing urban forestry network.

Despite the nationwide popularity and success of the SBA program, it was cancelled after Congressman Smith was defeated in 1995. He had insisted that SBA receive no administrative funds to execute the program and, of course, this made it a target for removal every year, as the agency was happy to offer it up at budget time. It has never been forgotten by those who were involved and there is always the hope that the SBA program might be revived—this time, with administrative funds supplied.

1992-PRESENT: DEC AND LOCAL PARTNERS WORK WITH REGIONAL RELEAF COMMITTEES

Nancy Wolf as Volunteer Coordinator was particularly eager to learn names and contact information of community members who might be interested in forming the ReLeaf planning committees for each region. These voluntary groups would help to create the connections between the professional work of DEC foresters and others in the communities that New York ReLeaf would be expected to serve. They were not hard to find—and some had already begun specific and informal work of their own.

The volunteers who helped create the committees came with a wide variety of knowledge and skills, including those who were professionals in forestry, arboriculture, landscape architecture, urban planning, environmental education, and other fields. Many were members of civic organizations or beautification projects and were overjoyed to discover that these pursuits were now going to be taken more seriously. Leadership also came from not-for-profit organizations that had been advocating for municipal tree planting or individuals who had been doing actual tree planting with their own staffs and with volunteers.

For example, volunteer Paul Kerzner of the Ridgewood, Queens neighborhood was a student at Fordham Law School in the 1970s and was concerned that his neighborhood had so few trees. He determined to change things. He managed to contact one of the top officials in the NYC Parks Department and convinced him to provide matching funds for personal donations from his neighbors. Paul then went door to door, asking for \$20 from each household. (Many of those in the neighborhood at that time were of German heritage and they loved the lindens that were planted, which reminded them of the famous Unter den Linden boulevard in Berlin.) The project was adopted by the longstanding Greater Ridgewood Restoration Corporation which became the Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic Association. They are still receiving specific city funds for tree planting. Paul became active on the New York City ReLeaf committee and with the statewide Council.

Mrs. Hattie Carthan and her neighbors in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn formed the Vernon Avenue T&T Association in the 1960s and began to advocate for street trees, raising some of their own money. They became so well known that then-mayor John Lindsay visited the block and pledged matching funds. With this success, Mrs. Carthan's group felt empowered to save a special tree nearby that was slated to be cut down to create a parking lot. It was a beautiful *Magnolia grandiflora*—a species that thrived in the South, but was rare in northern climes. Due to their action, the tree was saved and the three adjacent brownstones were renovated and given to the newly created Magnolia Tree Earth Center that continues to sponsor tree related and environmental programming today. Eventually, staff of Magnolia joined the New York City ReLeaf committee and a later Magnolia Executive Director, Arthur Sheppard, served as a Council leader.

Environmental Action Coalition and the Council on the Environment of New York City (now GrowNYC) co-sponsored the NYC Street Tree Consortium to advocate for more street tree planting by the city and also to train volunteers to maintain tree pits and prune trees from the ground. The organization became its own not-for-profit and is active today as Trees New York. The Citizen Tree Pruner course is given regularly to adults and teenagers and is an important part of volunteer urban forestry work. Staff of Trees New York became part of the founding of the Region 2 ReLeaf committee and the Council.

Another successful organization that has focused on work with young people is the Onondaga Earth Corps of Syracuse, founded in 2005 as part of a restructuring of the Eli MacDonald Green Team. Its mission is to foster active participants in creating positive change for their communities and the environment, which has included planting trees. It has focused on workforce advancement through learning projects and its members have often presented at statewide conferences.

On Long Island, science teacher Robert (Bob) Sympson, another Council founder, led the creation of Spruce Up, a "school-based partnership of children and trees." Spruce Up became an important component of ReLeaf. At its Region 1 NY ReLeaf workshop in November of 2001, the agenda included Introduction to ReLeaf, Why Plant Trees (stressing the environmental, social, and economic benefits of trees), Planning for Planting, and Getting the Tree in the Ground (stressing proper planting procedures). A tree raffle provided the cost of one bare root tree and one balled & burlapped tree.

In the Village of Ellicottville in western New York, Jody Bentley led the "Alley Cats" group that decorated the village with hanging baskets of flowers and urged elected leaders to plant trees as advised by Consulting Forester Bruce Robinson. Jody is still active in community affairs and her group was a leader in sponsoring the first ReLeaf workshop in Region 9, held at the nearby Nannen Arboretum. Despite a rainy day, sixty people attended the second Region 9 workshop at the Chautauqua Institution, where a silver maple from Schichtel's Nursery was planted by Arborist Jim Kisker. A recent visit to the site shows the tree is quite large and thriving.

Fayetteville in Region 7 had created its Tree Commission in 1991, led by volunteers Nancy Needham and the late Patricia Tobin. Its early efforts were enhanced as they became faithful leaders in both the ReLeaf committee for their region and in the formation of the statewide Council. Fayetteville received SBA grants that led to a major expansion of their street tree plantings. An official Tree City since 2000, Fayetteville now plants bare root trees each fall and provides instructions for citizens to properly mulch and water them. The Fayetteville Tree Commission also provides basic tree pruning training to citizens.

Of all the groups that pioneered street tree plantings before the official start of ReLeaf, none is more admirable than ReTree Schenectady, started in Patricia (Pat) Burkey's kitchen in 1991. Like so many others, Pat became concerned that trees in her area were dying and not being replaced. Schenectady, an old and proud city, had suffered economically for many years and had no tree planting budget at all. Pat and her neighbors began planting small (5- to 10-gallon) trees in tree lawns along the streets and began receiving advice from Cornell Cooperative Extension and DEC. Betsy Henry, who leads ReTree today, joined Pat and became active in the Council as well.

Working directly with citizen participation and financial donations, this small all-volunteer group has, at this writing, planted approximately 4,000 bare root and container trees around Schenectady. ReTree has unfortunately not been able to secure regular budget lines for City-paid trees, although they have received tree planting help from the Parks Department. Some of the DEC grants that the City of Schenectady has received have come through ReTree as a not-for-profit organization. ReTree has also received grants from the National Tree Trust, National Grid's "10,000 Trees and Growing" program, and other sources. ReTree was pleased that Union

College received a DEC grant to plant trees on its campus, and is gratified that the City planning department now requires trees as part of every new development.

As Re-Leaf committees and the council were created, the valuable knowledge and experience of community leaders and volunteers were key. They often took the lead on identifying specifics such as sites, the best time of year to hold meetings, overall project design, and the creation of an extensive list of invitees. Often, the professional and real-life experiences of the committee members were especially helpful, particularly in the beginning when many communities had not had prior direct contact with the DEC foresters.

1992-PRESENT: DEC AND RELEAF COMMITTEES SPONSOR REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

The overall goal of all components of ReLeaf was and is to plant more trees in communities of all sizes using sustainable management practices to create an ever more diverse urban and community forest that can provide maximum benefits for the people living within it. In the beginning, this fundamental goal needed to be articulated clearly and spread widely via communications, outreach, and workshops.

Under the supervision of Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Wolf, various educational publications were produced and graphic designer Leslie Kameny created the official logo and cover of the booklet, *New York ReLeaf: Partnership for a Tree-Filled Future*. The now well-known logo is still in use and the information from the original booklet lives on in various forms. Writers for the booklet included active volunteer Naomi Zurcher, who conceived the idea of using quotations from New York State governors to start the three sections of the booklet:

New York ReLeaf: How It Happened was introduced by former NY Governor and U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt's 1907 White House Arbor Day Message, in which he exhorted listeners to "... celebrate your Arbor Day thoughtfully, for within your lifetime the nation's need of trees will become serious ..." and the section ended with the poem "Dream Variation" by Langston Hughes, who rests "at cool evening beneath a tall tree."

New York ReLeaf: How It Works was introduced by a quotation from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, also a former NY governor. In *The Wit and Wisdom of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, he wrote, "A forest is not solely so many thousand board feet of lumber to be logged when market conditions make it profitable. It is an integral part of our natural land covering, and the most potent factor in maintaining nature's delicate balance in the organic and inorganic worlds." This section ended with a quote from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*: "How the trees rise and stand up with strong trunks, with branches and leaves! (Surely there is something more in each of these trees, some living soul.)"

New York ReLeaf: How It Succeeds was introduced by a quote from then-Governor Mario Cuomo in 1993, by special request. He said, "As guardians of the good earth, trees stand silent sentry over our planet, strengthening our soil, creating the air we breathe, enriching our lives with their natural splendor. When we protect and nurture our trees, we protect and nurture ourselves." The ending quote by poet Piri Thomas, again by request, reflected city life: "A thought comes to mind of summertimes ago, of trees in Central Park, the children playing

Tarzan, making believe branches were tree houses and that we were free. Chirping like birds we flew, some made it and some did not. Trees, trees, trees without end, but if that is to be true, we must be friends of trees, so they will grow mighty from roots that are strong. It's the same for all the children in a world without end, amen."

As ReLeaf committees were organized in various regions, Committee Structure Guidelines were written to provide guidance:

1. Each committee should be led by two co-chairs and be as self-sustaining as possible and will consist of volunteers partnered with DEC regional foresters;
2. Committees will connect municipalities, not-for-profits, and industry professionals to encourage and use the best practices in urban forestry;
3. Committees will provide stewardship and professional development workshops and training for local communities;
4. Committees will be a resource for urban forestry technical expertise in New York State communities.

From those early days to the present time, the above guidelines have been followed. With committees conducting at least one workshop per calendar year, and sometimes two, the wealth of information and expertise has covered the gamut. Every aspect of ReLeaf education and action can be found, including the favorites:

- *Best practices for choosing the right tree for the right site;
- *Soil preparation, planting, and follow-up procedures;
- *Update on expanded lists of tree selection, especially for difficult sites;
- *Latest scientific information from research partners;
- *Community outreach and recruitment of volunteers;
- *Publicity;
- *Advocacy techniques; and (last but not least)
- *Fund-raising.

Committees began the necessary work to conduct workshops in the spring of 1993, with local focus in each area. The list of workshops, done so early in the program, is impressive and indicative of the activity to come. Few brochures are still available for details, but all in the first set used the same title: *Building Green Partnerships*. The 1993 workshops took place:

Regions 1 (Long Island) in Planting Fields Arboretum, Oyster Bay on May 8th;

Region 4 (Capital District) in Central Park, Schenectady on June 5th;

Region 5 (Northern Adirondacks) at Paul Smith's College in the hamlet of Paul Smiths on May 22nd;

Region 6 (Utica/Rome/Watertown) at Jefferson County Community College, Watertown on June 5th;

Region 7 (Central New York) at SUNY Binghamton University in Binghamton on May 6th;

Region 9 (Western New York) at Nannen Arboretum in Ellicottville on May 20th.

***Region 2's brochure is available; the workshop in New York City was held May 15th in the South Tower of the World Financial Center, courtesy of Merrill Lynch. Sponsors, in addition to DEC, included Citizens Committee for New York City, NYC Arbor Day Committee, NYS Forest Practice Board, and Battery Park City Parks. Co-sponsors included Council of Lower East Side Block Associations, Crotona Community Foundation, Historic District Council, Lower East Side Ecology Center, and Magnolia Tree Earth Center. This combination of those involved showcased the goal of bringing a wide variety of participants to the table.

The agenda for Region 2's first workshop featured:

Introduction to ReLeaf by DEC's Urban Forestry Coordinator Peter Innes and Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Wolf.

How to Get Trees Planted in Your Neighborhood featuring Keith Kriet of the NYC Parks Department, Judy Stanton of the Brooklyn Heights Association, and Paul Kerzner of the Ridgewood Civic Association.

How to Take Care of Your Neighborhood Trees presented by DEC Senior Forester Greg Owens, Consulting Forester William Lough, Rachel Friend of Sunset Park Restoration, ML Johnson and Benjie Plotch of Magnolia Tree Earth Center, and Citizen Pruner Michelle Walker.

After lunch, Battery Park City Park gardeners and forestry experts led tree walks in the nearby area, which had recently been planted. One focus was on the selection of trees and other plants, some of which had been removed and re-planted with more appropriate species. A number of original choices had not survived well, due to salt spray from the brackish Hudson River. This clearly illustrated one of the important lessons of ReLeaf: the right tree in the right site. After the walk, appropriate take-home materials were distributed.

***Region 3's brochure is also available. Its workshop was held on May 8th at Stony Kill Environmental Center in Wappingers Falls. Region 3's first workshop featured:

Welcome and Introduction to the Program by Regional Forester Fred Gerty and Director of Stony Kill Herb Eschbach.

Introduction of Forestry Partners including Orange and Rockland Utility, Poughkeepsie Parks and Recreation, and the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (which manages Catskills forests protecting NYC's drinking water reservoirs).

DEC Supervising Forester Bob Herberger explained the techniques of *Forming Your Partnership*, followed by presentations from Community Partners: Village of Goshen, Trees for Rye, Catskill Center, and Poughkeepsie Shade Tree Commission.

After lunch, tree planting and maintenance were demonstrated by staff of the Catskill Forestry Association and DEC foresters.

***Region 8's brochure shows *Building Green Partnerships* was held at Finger Lakes Community College, Canandaigua on April 24, 1994.

The agenda included:

Welcome and Introduction by Denise Penziul of Spencer Crest Nature Center, DEC Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator Peter Frank, DEC Regional Forester for Region 8 Robert Morrison, and Rochester City Forester Andrew Pleninger.

DEC Senior Forester for Region 8 Mark Keister explained *Basic Forestry and Biology*.

Pleninger and Frank then focused on *Tree Selection: What trees should I select? Where do I get them? and How do I pay for them?*

Outdoor demonstrations followed, showing planting techniques and maintenance by Monroe County Cooperative Extension Agent Jim Willmot, DEC Region 8 Senior Foresters James Pitt and Bill Morris, and Andrew Pleninger.

Following lunch, Pleninger and community representatives presented on *Rochester Ice Storm*; Leo Kamalsky of Newark Tree Committee presented on *Community Tree Inventories and Planning Newark*; and Webster Superintendent of Public Works David Galeazzo spoke on *Making Urban Forestry Work in Webster*.

Since the early days, workshops sponsored by regional ReLeaf committees have taken place every year, with most committees executing one per year. Although specific numbers are difficult to calculate, even simple math of 28 years x 9 regions would put the number at approximately 250 organized opportunities for learning about and celebrating trees. In addition, many who attend ReLeaf workshops are attracted to other workshops held by natural resources and educational professionals.

Real enthusiasts have also attended the yearly statewide ReLeaf conferences sponsored by the Council and DEC, which provide many opportunities for social events and networking. These conferences are held all over the state—from Long Island and New York City to Buffalo and Rochester. Many tree folks from New York State have attended and presented at the yearly Partners in Community Forestry conferences organized by the Arbor Day Foundation with many sponsors and cooperators.

Statistics from 2018 through June of 2022 show that DEC Urban Forestry Program Coordinator Gloria Van Duyne, Partnership Coordinator Christina McLaughlin, and Technical Coordinator Daniel Gaidasz have assisted in 48 regional workshops throughout the state, including many by webinar. Topics have been varied, with many focusing on high-level technical and arboricultural specifics. Other topics included more broad themes, such as *Stewardship for Sustainability*;

Volunteers and Professionals, Creating Connections; The Power of Storytelling in Grant Writing; Public Trees and Public Health; and Climate and Community Forestry Programs.

The regional ReLeaf committees have been co-chaired by DEC foresters and non-DEC leaders from local government, Cornell Cooperative Extension, non-profit organizations, or community activists. As of May 2022, the following non-DEC leaders were part of the work:

Region 1/Long Island ReLeaf: Michael Fiorentino, Cornell Cooperative Extension, partially paid by DEC federal funds

Region 2/New York City ReLeaf: Rachel Grumm, NYC Parks Department

Region 3/Hudson Valley ReLeaf: Jean Zimmerman, Arborist and Region 3 Chair

Region 4/Capital District ReLeaf (under re-organization, though DEC staff have worked closely with Albany, Schenectady, and Troy in grants and Tree City programs)

Region 5/Southern Adirondacks ReLeaf: Steven Lashomb, City of Saratoga Springs

Region 6/Leatherstocking ReLeaf (Utica/Rome/Watertown): Glen Roberts, Former DEC Forester and now active volunteer

Region 7/Central New York ReLeaf: (none at this time)

Region 8/Finger Lakes ReLeaf: Jason Beardsley, Monster Tree Service

Region 9/Western New York ReLeaf: Lori Brockelbank, Davey Resource Group

PRESENT-DAY DEC LEADERSHIP CONTINUES OUTREACH AND WORKSHOP MODELS

The present-day successors to the early leaders, all based in DEC's Albany offices, Urban Forestry Program Coordinator Gloria Van Duyne, Partnership Coordinator Christina McLaughlin, Technical Coordinator Daniel (Dan) Gaidasz (who is also a forester and an ISA-certified arborist), and Environmental Education Assistant Matthew Viglucci are continuing and expanding previous work, building on the model that was so firmly established.

However, with the pandemic that began in early 2020 and that is still in place, they faced the most challenging period in the history of ReLeaf. During that difficult time of lockdown and uncertainty, in addition to other work, they encouraged local ReLeaf committees to continue to meet and plan virtual programming, using the hosting platform Webex. The superior technological assistance DEC staff provided has enabled local groups to succeed through this period.

The workshops that were made possible in 2020 and 2021 were:

Region 1 (Long Island): *Mini-workshop: *Tour of Clark Botanical Garden*: October 2020
**Right Tree, Right Place* (webinar): February 2021

Region 2 (New York City): **Creating Connections: Volunteers and Professionals* (webinar): October 2020 **Moving Forward: Resilience through COVID* (webinar): May 2021

Region 3 (Hudson Valley): **Climate and Community Forest Programs* (webinar): May 2021

Region 5 (Southern Adirondacks): **Building and Maintaining Your Healthy Community Forest* (webinar): October 2020 **Southern Adirondacks Forest Health Update* (webinar): May 2021

Region 6 (Leatherstocking District/Rome/Utica/Watertown): **Furthering Urban Forestry Programs through Grants and Partnerships* (webinar): May 2021

Region 7 (Central New York): **Municipal Tree Ordinances and Associated Management Plans* (webinar): October 2020 **Soil Workshop at Cornell*: October 2021

Region 8 (Finger Lakes): **What's Eating My Trees and How Do I Kill Them? (Spongy Moth)* (webinar): September 2020 **Electrical Hazard Awareness Training* (webinar): May 2021 **Tree Decay and Risk Workshop in Geneseo*: November 2021

Region 9 (Western New York): **Tour of Draves Arboretum*: September 2020

During this time, two statewide workshops were also held: **An Overview of the Ecological Assessment of New York City's Natural Areas and Research Stemming From It* (webinar): June/2020 **Urban Forest Health Update* (webinar): January 2021

In 2022 (as of June 30th), workshops continued:

Region 2: *Stewardship for Resilience* (in-person, Queens Botanical Garden): March 25th

Region 3: *Public Trees and Public Health* (webinar): May 11th

Region 3: *Telling Your Story: The Power of Storytelling in Grant Writing*: (webinar): May 18th

Region 5: *Tribal Values for the Natural World* (webinar): February 15th

Region 8: *Electrical Hazard Awareness Training* (in-person, Rochester): May 10th

1992-PRESENT: THE URBAN AND FORESTRY COUNCIL BECOMES A STRONG PARTNER FOR NEW YORK RELEAF

1992-1999: The Informal Council is Organized and Participates as a ReLeaf Partner

Per the original Forest Service rules to create the third required component—the non-defined Council—DEC declared it open to anyone who was interested. This was a wise decision, as it created a wide variety of talented persons that has grown in numbers and is flourishing today. The informal group that first emerged was extremely fortunate to be able to turn to university-based volunteer leaders: Professor Nina Bassuk of Cornell and the late Professor Norman Richards of SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Nina had created the Urban Horticulture Institute in 1980, and she and graduate students were well on their way to becoming national and international experts on the best way for trees to be planted and thrive in stressful

locations. Norm had long advocated that forestry expand from the "deep woods" into communities and had taught and mentored many of DEC's foresters who were now in positions across the state.

The development of the informal Council coincided with the establishment of the regional ReLeaf committees via DEC's own efforts. Nina remembers the "founding" as a meeting that was called by Urban Forestry Coordinator Peter Innes in Albany, where volunteers from around the state decided that the new organization would focus on planning and executing annual conferences. Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Wolf provided networking and connection services with funding for each conference put in place by DEC as part of ReLeaf. Nina became the first chair (the position is now called president) and has continued to be deeply involved throughout the history of the Council.

In addition, as part of the Council's organizing work, Nina and her graduate students received grants from DEC and the Forest Service to begin working with Cornell Cooperative Extension to develop technical training workshops that were held in many locations. Partnering with Extension Educator Joann Gruttadaurio, Nina held early workshops in 1992 and 1993 in Oyster Bay (Region 1), New York City (Region 2), Millbrook (Region 3), Glens Falls (Region 5), Oriskany (Region 6), Ithaca (Region 7), Rochester (Region 8), and Buffalo (Region 9.) Each workshop took two days, beginning with afternoon presentations followed by field studies the next day that focused on observation techniques, species ID, and tree establishment.

Later, Nina and her students developed SWAT: Student Weekend Arborist Team. A PowerPoint was created that was presented as part of her two-day sessions in 48 communities between 2002 and 2013, according to Nina's records. The information was comprehensive, including details on "Why Do Inventory?" Inventories are the invaluable first step, she stressed, to learn the current state of the urban forest and to best focus limited resources on long-term management and health. This will help create the well-known benefits of thriving urban trees: economic and environmental benefits, as well as aesthetics and beauty. Proper planting instructions were part of the mix, including information about the use of CU-Structural Soil that Nina and team developed at Cornell within her Urban Horticulture Institute (UHI) research program. Nina's outreach has also provided information on species diversity, with an ever-growing list of trees that have been shown to succeed in harsh conditions under city pavements.

Nina's academic work over the years was aided by the arrival in Ithaca of Andrew (Andy) Hillman, another Council founder and a professional arborist who was hired as Ithaca City Forester after his work as Oswego City Arborist. Through the Council's website (nysufc.org), readers can find the blog post, "Andy Hillman Reflects on Career, What's Next, and Why UCF Has Arrived," in which he shares some of the risks he and Nina took in expanding the list of tree species, using Ithaca as their applied-research laboratory.

Andy describes their planting of new cultivars to learn if they would succeed and also their partnership with city engineers who accepted CU-Soil as they observed trees thriving in it. He was particularly proud of the success of planting southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) in the "banana belt" of Ithaca—a sheltered area in one of Ithaca's famous gorges. Nina's and Andy's success in Ithaca inspired others around the state to expand the then-limited numbers of species, using trial-and-error methods and research to create urban forests of today that are healthier and more diverse.

At the same time, the creators of New York ReLeaf were able to draw on many years of research by scientists at the Forest Service, including the seminal work of Dr. Greg McPherson at University of California Davis, Dr. John Dwyer at the Chicago Forest Service Office, and Dr. David Nowak at the Forest Service's Northeastern Research Station at the College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse (SUNY-ESF). Dr. Nowak, known to us as Dave, was then in his early career. He pioneered the connection of urban trees to air pollution mitigation, while Dr. McPherson focused on energy conservation and Dr. Dwyer addressed the social aspects of planting more trees in urban communities.

The 1994 publication of *Chicago Urban Forest Climate Project* by Dave and others was noted in the *New York Times* and helped bring more widespread recognition of the connection between the work of "the tree people" (as they were there known) and major air pollution issues. He and colleagues also developed specific computer applications, including the revolutionary i-Tree suite of tools, which advanced the ability to collect data and establish the economic and ecosystem value of urban forests as communities began examination of their urban trees.

Like their counterparts across the country, NY ReLeaf activists seized on this and other information to make the case to local, state, and national budget-makers that urban forestry was a serious field of science and practice that deserved recognition and funding. In addition to following the work by Nina Bassuk and her students and colleagues and the scientific research from the Forest Service and other sources, the informal Council founders worked eagerly to identify community leaders, interested staff of not-for-profit organizations, and natural resources professionals who would donate their time. Naturally, there was major interconnection and overlap between this group and the regional committees, which worked to strengthen the overall program. This valuable collaboration has continued to exist to the present time.

The value of research on the impacts of trees on air quality and energy usage was highly prized by the emerging statewide programs and by the growing national network of urban and community forestry professionals and volunteers, coming together under the Alliance for Community Trees (ACT). Proof of ACT's support was necessary in 1996 when the Forest Service proposed eliminating the budget line supporting the urban forestry related research at SUNY-ESF and at U.C. Davis.

Due to widespread consternation, support was garnered from ACT, the National Association of State Foresters, American Forests, and the Arbor Day Foundation. Leaders of this informal coalition reached out to the members of the sub-committee of the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee, who would approve or disapprove the Forest Service draft budget. Fortunately, there were two key representatives who understood the importance of the work: Congressman James Walsh, representing Syracuse and Congressman Vince Fazio, representing Sacramento and Davis. To our great satisfaction, a special \$1 million line was inserted in the budget to support the important work being done by Dr. Nowak (Syracuse) and Dr. McPherson (Davis) and this type of urban forestry research support has been continued.

In September, 2021, more recognition of the value of the long years of work by so many came when Phillip Rodbell of the Northeast Region (now falling under the Eastern administrative region) of the U.S. Forest Service was detailed to the White House as part of a group that is advising policy on mitigation of extreme heat, which has become a major part of climate change. Phillip and others will provide the input from urban forestry to the discussion.

1992-1996: DEC AND THE INFORMAL COUNCIL SPONSOR YEARLY STATEWIDE CONFERENCES

Under the leadership of Dr. Nina Bassuk and other volunteers, assisted by Urban Forestry Coordinator Peter Innes and Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Wolf, the NYS Council convened its first statewide conference at Cornell University in Ithaca on July 24 and 25, 1992, beginning on Friday afternoon and concluding mid-afternoon on Saturday. This Friday/Saturday format (now expanded to Thursday afternoon and Friday morning) proved successful and is still being used today. The conference title, *New York ReLeaf*, introduced the program that was just beginning.

Nina Bassuk, Peter Innes, and DEC State Forester Robert Bathrick welcomed the attendees and introduced the keynote speaker, Urban Forestry Consultant Robert (Bob) Skiera, who had been the longtime City Forester for Milwaukee, Wisconsin and later became President of the International Society of Arboriculture. Bob had become well-known to urban forestry pioneers through his participation in the national conferences organized by American Forests and the Forest Service.

Bob's presentation, *Making Things Happen in the Urban Environment: Supporting Partnerships with Government, Volunteers, Researchers, and Industry*, was a perfect launching point for the ReLeaf program that was being developed in New York State.

Following the keynote, *ReLeaf Participants Speak Out* was facilitated by Nancy Wolf, featuring perspectives from "an arborist, forester, environmentalist, volunteer, city planner, utility company representative, landscape contractor, forest industry representative, and nurseryman." Clearly, ReLeaf had already attracted an array of those who were needed to establish and expand the program.

Workshops followed, including *Community Action Workshop*, *Volunteer Recruitment and Training*, *Funding Strategies*, *Plant Selection*, *Government's Role*, and *Environmental and Forestry Education*. At the end of the day, attendees enjoyed a barbecue at Taughannock State Park, initiating another tradition that has been a highlight of the annual conference. Many friendships were begun that Friday night that have continued; the socializing and networking at statewide conferences has been one of the most important aspects of NY ReLeaf's success.

Saturday's field tours established yet another tradition that continues to be popular. In the early morning, participants chose between *Recognizing & Analyzing Landscape Problem Sites* on the Cornell campus or Ithaca city sites, or *Plant Materials Tours* at the Cornell Plantations Test Gardens, both followed by a picnic at the Test Gardens. The conference wrapped up with the ReLeaf participants from the previous day leading a discussion of *Creating Future Policy for Community Forestry*. Nina Bassuk and Peter Innes ended the program with a summary before wishing everyone a safe trip home.

In retrospect, this successful introductory conference was able to establish the young program in a most substantial way. Details of subsequent conferences differ, but the collaboration of interactive verbal/audio/visual presentations with relevant field trips has created structure that has been built upon and the wealth of information and active demonstration have been the underpinning of conferences each year.

Conferences following 1992 under the leadership of the informal Council were:

- * 1993: *Celebrating Our Roots* at Cornell University, Ithaca
- * 1994: *The Community in Community Forestry* at SUNY-ESF
- * 1995: *Inside Urban Ecosystems* at the Marriott Marquis Hotel, New York City. This was a national conference.
- * 1996: (Brochure with name and agenda now lost) at State University of New York at New Paltz (SUNY-New Paltz). DEC's Community Forestry 1996 Annual Report noted that the highlight of the two-day conference was a hands-on inventory workshop that allowed attendees to participate in a street tree inventory on the streets surrounding the SUNY-New Paltz campus.
- * 1997: *At the Cutting Edge: Urban and Community Forestry* at Cornell University, Ithaca
- * 1998: *Integrating the Regional Forest: From Street Trees to Watersheds* at Hofstra University, Hempstead, Long Island

1995: DEC AND NEW YORK RELEAF ARE ASKED TO HOST THE NATIONAL URBAN FORESTRY CONFERENCE

New York State has been well-represented at the national urban forestry conferences, beginning with the first one in 1978, in Washington, D.C. American Forests and the U.S. Forest Service continued to collaborate on these conferences for many years; they gained much attention and popularity. Early conferences were held every two to three years in cities like Cincinnati, Orlando, St. Louis, and Los Angeles; they are now annual events, called Partners in Community Forestry, led by the Arbor Day Foundation. The 2020 conference was held virtually, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It resumed being held in person on November 17 and 18, 2021 in Louisville, Kentucky. The 2022 conference will be held in Seattle, Washington in November.

As New Yorkers and their work became more widely known, it was decided that it was time for the national conference to be held in New York City. NYSDEC, with its successful ReLeaf program, was expected to take the local lead.

Inside Urban Ecosystems was held September 12-16, 1995 at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Manhattan and attracted a large national and international attendance. In addition to the main organizer, American Forests, other national sponsors included the U.S. Forest Service, Presenting Sponsor Chevrolet/Geo Environmental, Benefactor Sponsor International Paper, and Major Sponsor Texaco, which had long supported American Forests.

Patron Sponsors were Brooklyn Union Gas Company and Consolidated Edison Company of New York, and Corporate Sponsors were F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Company, Sterling Vineyards of California, Westvaco, Coors Brewing Company, and NatWest Bank.

DEC Bureau Chief Dan Weller, Urban Forestry Coordinator Peter Frank, and Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Wolf helped to create the planning team with American Forests and Forest Service. Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Wolf assisted American Forests' corporate fundraiser in

soliciting top grants from International Paper and Texaco, as well as recruiting Con Edison, Brooklyn Union Gas Company, and Bartlett.

A special DEC grant to Trees New York sponsored publicity by Naomi Zurcher, which included arranging for entertainment following the major dinner. Singer Richie Haven read a section from Jean Giono's *The Man Who Planted Trees* with the Paul Winter Consort's musical interpretation as accompaniment. A special outreach for attendance was made to the French Institute Alliance, Francaise, to inform their membership. Naomi also created a popular souvenir t-shirt that listed the Latin names of common street trees as part of the design, including "Novi eboraci" for the Big Apple (New York City.)

Brooklyn Union Gas's sponsorship created the conference's opening three-screen video that showcased urban forestry in the New York City region and was followed by a standing ovation. Beautifully photographed and produced by the company's own staff, they collaborated with Nancy Wolf and EAC to select sites and recruit professionals who illustrated aspects of their work. The sensitively written narrative was spoken by actor Frances Sternhagen and scored to music. The ending featured poet Piri Thomas reading the text he had written for the New York ReLeaf booklet about trees and children in Central Park. (This video was later entered in the New York Festivals Advertising Awards competition and won a Silver Medal at the Festivals' awards event in January, 1996.)

Conference proceedings were edited by Cheryl Kollin of American Forests and by Robert Ricard, the Urban and Community Forester of Connecticut. Major components of the program included *Structure of Urban Ecosystems*, *Function of Urban Ecosystems*, *Linkages within the Urban Ecosystem*, *Urban Forestry Education*, *Cultural Perspectives on Urban Forestry*, *Local Economics in Action*, *Minority Partnerships in Volunteer Action*, and *Communication and Policy*.

Local presentations included *New York City's Forest: An Identity Complex* by NYC Parks Urban Forest & Education Project Manager Tony Emmerich. He said, "Things that are not purely economic become significantly cultural ... the worth of [the urban forest's] biological assets lies in their functions as an open 'zoo' for indigenous forest animals not found elsewhere in the city, as refuge and reserve for native plants, as aquifer re-charge and flood-control sites and, most importantly, as a cultural resource that relates city people positively to their environment and their history."

The *Panel on Urban Forestry Education*, led by Gerard Lordahl of the Council on the Environment of New York City (now GrowNYC) celebrated opportunities for youth to learn about urban forests and to access career opportunities through participation with many agencies and organizations around the country that sponsor in-school and community activities, internships, and summer jobs. Michelle Gosine, a student at the High School for Environmental Studies in NYC, explained her own knowledge of the urban environment as she learned to care for street trees through the Young Citizen Pruner Course taught by staff of Trees New York.

Social activities included parties by local tree groups for their counterparts who represented not-for-profits from the Alliance for Community Trees (ACT). Representatives of ACT member-groups attended, including Trees Forever from Iowa, Trees Atlanta, Dallas Trees and Parks Foundation, Sacramento Tree Foundation, TreePeople from Los Angeles, Twin Cities Tree Trust

from Minneapolis/St. Paul, Tree New Mexico, and Trees for Tucson. ACT sponsored a special tree planting and vespers service at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, which was and is known for its environmental programming. Singers from the Cathedral led the service in the choir of the huge church, which included the beautiful song, "Now is the Cool of the Day." The service ended by the blessing of the new street tree planted in front of the Cathedral.

Proof of the value of New York ReLeaf's growing and successful partnerships that was exhibited in the national conference was also shown in the DEC 2001 Annual Report to the U.S. Forest Service Northeastern Area office. The report, provided by Peter Frank, showed detailed descriptions of DEC forester activities and those of many of their partners. These included the 2001 State ReLeaf Conference in Rochester, co-sponsored by the Council, DEC, and the Region 8 local planning committee; the statewide Arbor Day program with its Arbor Day poster contest; local projects such as Long Island's "Spruce Up"; arboricultural work on the grounds of historic properties in Poughkeepsie and Beacon; the state's Big Tree Program fostered by Capital District ReLeaf; and the NYS Quality Communities Interagency Task Force, which conducted a "multifaceted and interdisciplinary study of issues which might impact the creation of community vision."

Peter provided statistics, such as number of participating communities (395), number of sustained communities (95), number of technical assists to communities (265), number of Tree City USA Communities (87), and number of hours of volunteer assistance to program (by those active around the state in local communities) (4,300). The value of technical assistance to communities had grown from \$290,016 in 1990 to \$432,700 in 1992. The Forest Service judged the quality of New York State's program as Good and the Council's diversity as Excellent.

1999: DEC PROVIDES FUNDS FOR THE COUNCIL TO BECOME A FORMAL NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATION

Under Peter Frank's leadership, JLN WOLF, Inc., a personal services corporation led by Nancy Wolf, was awarded a contract to work with Council Chair Nina Bassuk and others to organize and incorporate the Council as a formal, not-for-profit corporation. Council records show the Certificate of Incorporation by the NYS Department of State is dated April 7, 1999. The incorporating meeting was held on May 11, 1999 and official minutes were taken by Nancy Wolf. The Council applied to the IRS for tax exemption status, which was granted in a letter dated April 6, 2004. (The normal process for this exemption begins with an early status that is granted; once a corporation shows that its activities are within the educational guidelines for a tax-exempt corporation, a final letter is sent.)

Under President Nina Bassuk, a Board of Directors was chosen to guide the activities of the Council. This structure has continued and the Council has always been strongly led by volunteers. As a partner to DEC, the Council now receives a yearly pass-through grant from the Forest Service. The Council also receives sponsorships and attendance fees at the yearly conferences. As a 501(c)3 corporation, it is eligible for donations.

The Council's advocacy was crucial in establishment of an urban forestry line in the state budget and later in the NYS Environmental Protection Fund. As of the 2022-23 budget, the amount

allocated for urban forestry increased to \$3.2 million. The EPF funds support grant applications; Gloria Van Duyne reports that there were between 100 and 150 applications in the last few rounds and total requests went up to \$6 million in the most recent Round (15). The grants are very competitive.

The initial budget included support for part-time work by Nancy Wolf of JLN WOLF, Inc. as Executive Director, performing both administrative and programming duties. It also included funds for *Taking Root*, the new Council newsletter, which was then published three times per year. From 1999 through mid-2007, *Taking Root* was written by many volunteers, edited by Nancy Wolf, and designed by Leslie Kameny, who had previously designed the New York ReLeaf logo and other publications for the overall program. DEC paid for printing 10,000 copies of the newsletter; 8,000 were mailed directly to readers, and 2,000 were placed in the nine DEC regional offices around the state. The newsletter was used to inform readers, publicize Council work, and fund-raise for the Council.

Starting with the Summer 2007 issue, after a change from Executive Director Nancy Wolf to Executive Secretary Betty Shimo, the printed newsletter was continued and edited and designed by Gloria Van Duyne. Archives of the printed edition of *Taking Root* can be found on the Council's website, on the Newsletter page.

In 2014, the Council contracted with freelance editor, writer, and urban forestry subject matter specialist Michelle Sutton to transition *Taking Root* to a digital resource of a blog (with weekly posts) and monthly newsletter. She was also contracted to launch social media for the Council, and Michelle helped the Council find their web manager, Sarah Gugercin, also an urban forestry subject matter specialist, who redesigned and manages the NYSUFC website.

Council blog, newsletter, and social media stats are given in each year's Annual Report. Housed on the *nysufc.org* home page, the NYSUFC Blog was viewed more than 41,000 times in 2021. Pages other than the Blog, like About, Membership, ReLeaf Conference, and Resources were collectively viewed more than 6000 times in 2021. The Council's monthly e-newsletter, *Taking Root*, was opened by an average of 450 readers each month in 2021. On average, 130 people clicked on links in the newsletter each month. The NYSUFC ended 2021 with 599 followers on its Facebook page. The Council had 390 Twitter followers at year's end. The NYSUFC's Instagram account had 639 followers at the end of 2021. Engagements (likes and comments) averaged 27 per post. In 2021, Council YouTube Channel videos were viewed 661 times.

The Council has been guided well in the years since Nina Bassuk's stellar term as Chair, later President. (Nina retired from Cornell at the end of August 2022, but will continue her research). Nina was followed by Peter Pasnik, NYS Department of Transportation Landscape Architect from Buffalo; Andrew Pleninger, Rochester City Forester and now Urban Forestry Program Head of North Carolina's Forestry Department; the late Patricia (Pat) Tobin, community volunteer and activist from Fayetteville; Christian Mercurio of Rome City Government and now with Mohawk Valley EDGE; Andrew Hillman, City Arborist of Ithaca and later with Davey Tree Expert Company and now retired; David Moore, Urban Forester with the NYC Parks Department and now the Urban Forester of the City of Oakland, CA; and Karen Emmerich, Environmental Planner, who is now retired. As of July, 2021, Stephen Harris, City Arborist of Syracuse, was elected President.

Interviews with many of the past presidents show their interest and dedication to the developing Council.

* Dr. Nina Bassuk, who was so influential in the establishment of the Council, was pleased to remember that her goal of good collaboration was fulfilled; people began to work together in an expanded way as the Council became more organized. She handed over a stable organization to the next president.

* Peter Pasnik, who followed Nina, reported that he received a good foundation with the non-profit status in place and with Council members who were committed people, willing to assist at any time. His top priority was to keep the conferences going and to involve the public, which was also a top priority of the DEC foresters working with ReLeaf and the Council in the regions. He remains willing to help, particularly as the Council plans more diverse outreach.

* Andrew (Andy) Pleninger is building on many aspects of his work in New York State within the strong program in North Carolina. He remembers one of his first goals as Council president was to strengthen the administration and strategic planning and he led the 2005 five-year plan, the first update since the initial plan.

Andy also made a key recommendation that began to substantially change and strengthen the work of ReLeaf overall. He realized that no “needs study” had been done since the beginning of the overall program in 1992. Under his guidance, a study survey was created, asking municipalities what their urban forestry needs were and also what their estimates were of needed funding. Copies of the survey were sent by mail to every city, township, and village in the state and the results were sent by mail to the Council at the home office of Executive Director Nancy Wolf.

The response was robust and more successful than had been expected. When analyzed, it showed the financial need clearly: \$10 million, overall. The disparities among the various municipalities were also clear: the cities, even though badly under-funded, at least had some semblance of staff and expertise and the ability to hire outside consultants for their work; the townships had few active projects and did not see that planting trees was part of their responsibility; the villages, which had basically no local resources, were eager to be brought into a program that would provide expertise and trees for beautifying and enhancing their communities.

With this clear message, DEC was notified of the vast need and Council members began advocating for funds from the NYS budget through outreach to the legislature and the governor's office. This was not easy. In the previous budget year, Nancy Wolf, as Executive Director, had succeeded in convincing the environmental committees of the legislature to appropriate \$150,000, with most of the funding that was passed going to "cities of population above 65,000," which meant very few NY cities. The remaining funds were available to be otherwise distributed. She also was able to meet with representatives of the environmental organizations that had helped to create the NYS Environmental Protection Fund. After discussion, they agreed to support a line for urban forestry in the Parks section of the EPF budget.

Andy and Nancy well remember the meeting at which they delivered the needs survey report to their contacts at the governor's office. They were told, "We have already put your \$150,000 in the governor's budget!" "But here is our survey and we need \$10 million!" was their response. In

the next budget, the urban forestry budget increased to \$500,000 and much more began to come later.

* Many of those active in ReLeaf have fond memories of the late Patricia (Pat) Tobin, who followed Andy as president. Pat and other volunteers had created a strong tree planting and tree care program in Fayetteville and that experience helped her encourage others around the state to do the same. Pat was also a leader of the Council in financial oversight and brought into the leadership the late Brian Skinner, Senior Arborist of the Niagara Mohawk utility, who became one of the most valued Council leaders for many years. The company became a regular donor to the conferences and provided funding for trees in central New York. Brian and Pat were particularly involved in the research on selection of species appropriate for growing under the overhead utility wires, eliminating conflict between trees and wires—a simple technique that benefits the utility, the community, and the trees.

* Christian (Chris) Mercurio was introduced to many of the Council leaders at a Society of Municipal Arborists conference in Ithaca in 2002. He was quickly seen as enthusiastic and as one who was ready to take on leadership. He was then Rome City Forester and through his efforts, the Council was able to create a planning committee and execute its first conference in Region 6 in Utica and Rome in 2003. The theme of this conference, which focused on trees and economic re-development, became a major goal for Chris, who later became City Planner for Rome and is now with the Mohawk Valley EDGE, a coalition for environmental and economic development in six counties. Chris became a Council Board Member and he says he was "tapped" to become President by other leaders in 2009. In addition to the other Council goals, he continued to press for more integration with economic development. In 2013, *Rust to Green*, another conference in Utica and Rome, re-enforced that commitment.

* Andrew (Andy) Hillman, who had been in the leadership of the Council from the beginning, followed Chris as President, continuing to oversee every aspect of the Council, as he had done for years. Given the strong Board and volunteers, he focused on administration. He oversaw the work of Executive Secretary Betty Shimo, whose position was later assumed by Liana Gooding in 2015, and he recommended Michelle Sutton as the new contracted editor in 2014. Andy's strong leadership of the Municipal Forestry Institute of the Society of Municipal Arborists resulted in a major emphasis of the Council, which developed an annual scholarship that has enabled many Council leaders to attend.

* David Moore, who was an urban forester for the New York City Parks Department and an active volunteer for ReLeaf in Region 2, followed Andy as President. In an interview from Oakland, CA, where he is the city's urban forester, David said he was inspired by the work of other presidents and wanted to learn more, give back, and make contributions. His focus was strategic planning and he had led the Council as it created a five-year strategic plan during the fall of 2014. He also helped to co-design a new website, working with a group from the Board, DEC's Mary Kramarchyk, and Liana Gooding, the new Executive Secretary of the Council. David's one frustration was that good plans discussed at Board meetings were difficult to execute, due to Board members' many duties in their regular jobs. David expressed a desire for some limited program staff in future for the Council, to follow up on planning.

*Karen Emmerich, the immediate Past President of the Council, expressed her enjoyment at being in the role. She said she found Council members a pleasure to work with and said she had

never found a group of people who were so willing to share their skills and knowledge with others. "The Council's work and relationships were free of pointless drama," Karen says. She was President during a time of change in the DEC staff in Albany and helped bridge that time as planning continued for a conference in her own Region 3, working with Region 3 Forester George Profous. She praised the contracted, part-time Council staff: Liana Gooding, Sarah Gugercin, and Michelle Sutton.

In the future, Karen hopes that the Council continues to lead the way with relevant programming. She would like to see more grant funding for tree planting programs such as Quick Start funds for municipalities to move toward Tree City certification and Tree City Reward grants for communities that have been Tree Cities for five or more years. She says she would like to increase the numbers of Tree Campus Higher Education (formerly Tree Campus USA) certifications and increase grant funding for non-profit community forestry groups.

*At the annual conference in 2021 (held virtually), Stephen (Steve) Harris, Syracuse City Arborist and a long-time Council leader, was elected President. He reported that "I felt I owed it to the Council to serve because I'd gotten so much and I want to give back." He hopes to keep the Council on an "even keel." His vision is leading the Council to do more: what is the next step? To that end, he is pleased that the Council has contracted with Christina B. Smith as a part-time equity consultant. She will help the members create a new strategic plan that will include a review of the Council's mission, set real targets, and focus on how more people from all backgrounds can focus on trees and become involved. Work for the new plan has begun under the leadership of Council Vice President James Kaechele.

Steve also hopes the Council and ReLeaf can receive more support from the combined urban forestry funds and discussed the history of advocacy with Nancy as part of the interview. He has good access to representatives from Syracuse and knows the Council members need to be actively involved in advocacy with leadership from all sections of the state.

DEC AND THE FORMAL COUNCIL CONTINUE THE HISTORY OF SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCES

The formal Council, in partnership with the various ReLeaf Committees, has continued to sponsor annual conferences with DEC and other partners and sponsors.

* 1999: *Recreating Forests in Cities: Linking Past to Present* at Buffalo State College, Buffalo

* 2000: *Expanding Green Partnerships* at State University of New York, Albany

* 2001: *City in a Forest: Spanning the Centuries in Urban Forestry* at the University of Rochester, Rochester

* 2002: *Reinventing New York's Forest: Creating Greener Communities* at College of Mount Saint Vincent, Bronx/NYC

* 2003: *From Brown to Green: Urban Forestry & Economic Development* at Dewitt Clinton Hotel, Utica

- * 2004: *Planning for Green: Hudson Valley Perspectives* at Marist College, Poughkeepsie
- * 2005: *Urban Forestry: Changes and Challenges* at Le Moyne College, Syracuse
- * 2006: *Community Trees: The Next Generation in America's First Suburb* at C. W. Post/Long Island University, Brookville
- * 2007: *Community Trees: Are your Tree Programs on Track?* at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs
- * 2008: *Green Energy at Work: Urban Forestry Tools, Innovations, and Challenges* at Cornell University, Ithaca
- * 2009: *Greening the Big Apple: Forestry from the Streets* at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn
- * 2010: *The Social Tree: The Human Dimension of Our Urban Forest* at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva
- * 2011: *Plan a Tree: Good Planning* at SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz
- * 2012: *Partnerships to Build Your Tree Canopy* at Canisius College, Buffalo
- * 2013: *Rust 2 Green* at SUNY IT, Utica-Rome
- * 2014: *Standing Up for Long Island's Urban Forest* at Hofstra University, Hempstead
- * 2015: *Environmental Science and Urban Forestry* at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse
- * 2016: *Sustainable Urban Forestry; Digging In* at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs
- * 2017: *Strengthening Connections: Diversity in Our Urban Forest* at St. John's University, Queens/NYC
- * 2018: *Navigating the Complex Urban Forest* at Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester
- * 2019: *Community Forestry in a Rapidly Changing World* at Mount Saint Mary College, Newburgh
- *2020-2021: The 2020 conference was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was held virtually on July 23, 2021. Presentations included *How to Build a Successful Strategy to Turn Your Plans into Policy and Grow a Successful Urban Forestry Program in Your Community*; *Partnerships in the Buffalo Region with Community Tree Stewards*; and *Public/Private Partnerships in the Management of Urban Forests* (such as Delaware Park, an Olmsted park in Buffalo.)
- *2022: *Trees Bring Us Together* will be held in-person in Watertown, July 21-23.

1999: DEC AND COUNCIL PARTNERS CREATE STRATEGIC PLANS FOR THE PROGRAM

Peter Frank, who had become the Urban Forestry Coordinator in 1993, was highly supportive of the Council and its future. He convened an Advisory Committee to create a strategic plan for the Council and the forestry program, which met in May, 1999 in Albany. Although the resulting document is not available, the details were fortunately reported by Naomi Zurcher in the first issue of the Council's newsletter, *Taking Root*, which was published in June of 1999.

The strategic plan was designed to serve as a guiding document for the forestry program for the next five years. Putting it together was a "complex task," writes Naomi. Through facilitated meetings, the group formulated a Vision Statement:

"New York State's Urban and Community Forestry Program Brings Together Diverse People and Communities to Promote Public Understanding of the Value of Urban and Community Forests and to Advance their Ecologically-Sound Development, Management, and Use."

The Mission Statement reads: "New York State's Urban and Community Forestry Program is a Partnership of Public, Private, Volunteer Organizations and Individuals that Fosters Comprehensive Planning, Management, and Education throughout New York State to Create a Healthy Urban and Community Forestry Forest Ecosystem and Enhance Quality of Life."

The document was completed with Goals, Objectives and Tasks that were to be assigned to the various partners. For the Council, Chair Nina Bassuk wrote in the newsletter that "One of our major goals is to encourage and promote networking between all partners so that our diverse skills may become a powerful force to improve the environment. It will be important for us to move across the traditional boundaries that keep us in separate "camps"... Another goal is to promote urban and community forestry Best Management Practices through our educational efforts." Nina emphasized that though the Council would continue to work in partnership with the other components, it would "play a vital role in advising the DEC on how to channel federal urban forestry dollars to communities across the state and will advocate for greater support from all the sources so that our joint efforts might grow."

DEC AND PARTNERS DEVELOP A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN IN 2005

As reported in *Taking Root* in the Fall 2005, the Council and DEC developed a new five-year plan that was discussed and approved at the Council's fall board meeting, held in Albany on November 1, 2005. Under the leadership of President Andrew Pleninger, the members of the Strategic Planning Committee were Paul Kerzner of Region 2, Stephanie Mallozzi of Region 3, Diane Shoemaker and Chris Mercurio of Region 6, Brian Skinner and Pat Tobin of Region 7, Chris Luley of Region 8, and Mary Kramarchyk of DEC.

The Vision Statement of this 2005 plan states: "The New York State Urban and Community Forestry Council envisions that every community in New York State will recognize the value of trees and maximize the use of trees to help improve the community's quality of life."

The four goals developed were:

1. Attract public, private, and volunteer organizations and individuals to help promote the mission and vision of the Urban and Community Forestry Council, with the objective of increasing general membership by at least 30 members per year.
2. Promote the appreciation and understanding of the environmental, economic, and social benefits of trees in the urban and community environment, with emphasis on marketing and advocacy.
3. Advance urban and community forestry outreach, training, and education, including the annual conferences, workshops by the ReLeaf committees, and regular publication of the newsletter.
4. Promote and support comprehensive urban and community forestry planning and application of industry Best Management Practices and current research.

In reviewing the work, Andrew Pleninger expressed his appreciation: "Our plan will help us focus our efforts in meaningful and measureable ways."

THE COUNCIL TAKES LEAD IN THE 2014 STRATEGIC PLAN

Under the leadership of David Moore, the Council developed a new five-year strategic plan that reviewed the previous plan that had consisted of 33 tasks across the four goal areas. Board Members were asked to review and rank those tasks and offer new ones. After extensive discussion, ranking, and analysis, the Board selected a new set of 33 tasks that were deemed to have the interest and capacity to be implemented.

The Vision: "The New York State Urban Forestry Council envisions that every community in New York State will recognize the value of trees and maximize the use of trees to help improve the community's quality of life."

The Mission: "The New York State Urban Forestry program is a partnership of public, private, and volunteer organizations and individuals that fosters comprehensive planning, management, and education throughout New York to create a healthy urban forest and enhance quality of life."

Goal 1: Strengthen Board Structure and Membership; help promote the mission and vision of the Council.

Goal 2: Identify and Promote the Benefits of Trees; promote the appreciation and understanding of the environmental, economic, and social benefits of trees in the urban environment.

Goal 3: Provide Educational Tools; advance urban forestry outreach, training, and education.

Goal 4: Provide Planning and Management Tools; promote and support comprehensive urban forestry planning and the application of industry Best Management Practices and current research.

2022: A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

At the virtual Council Board Meeting and ReLeaf Conference on July 23, 2021, a decision was made to do a new strategic plan; work on this plan is underway.

THE COUNCIL AND PARTNERS USE CONTINUING RESEARCH AND FUND-RAISING TO GUIDE SUCCESSFUL WORK

Even before the beginning of New York ReLeaf as a major DEC/Partnerships program, learning about and following research was critical to success. As the recognition of the importance of urban forestry has grown, research at many levels has become available. Research has taken many avenues, from university-based, to the U.S. Forest Service research stations, to research by state and local governmental agencies, to not-for-profit organizations, to the practical and "learning by doing" at the local level.

Results of the many strands of research have been made available by major peer-reviewed publications in print and online, by dissemination by media of all types, by newsletters and blogs, at workshops and conferences, and by "each-one-teach-one."

Using the available research and building on the successful planning and execution of the overall program, DEC and its partners have created one of the most successful funding streams of any state in the country:

- * Regular funds from the U.S. Forest Service: \$1.3 million in Fiscal Year 2021-2022;
- * Dedicated funds from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund: \$3.2 million in Fiscal Year 2022-2023;
- * Special competitive grant funding, as it becomes available from the U.S. Forest Service;
- * Yearly Council membership and conference fees;
- * Other specific program funds that may periodically become available to the Council, as a not-for-profit corporation.

With abundant funds and strong professional and volunteer leadership, the future looks bright for New York State urban and community forestry and for New York ReLeaf.

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- * Mary Beck, Urban Forest Advocate, NYSUFC Board Member and previous DEC Urban Forestry Program Coordinator and Volunteer Coordinator

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