



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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One of Delaware's first green jobs training programs concludes successfully

Five former prisoners graduate from pilot re-entry program

WILMINGTON – The Center for Horticulture has been leading an unusual assemblage of partners to create one of Delaware's first green jobs training program. Five men, all recently released from prison or on work-release, were chosen in May for this pilot re-entry program. Over the summer they learned how to plant trees and other marketable landscaping maintenance skills that will aid in their transition back into society, while providing valuable services to the community.

The six-week job training included both classroom lectures and hands-on experience. Their biggest accomplishment was installing more than 150 trees in northeast Wilmington along 12th Street out towards the Cherry Island landfill. At the end of the program, the participants passed a certification test in proper tree care and other horticultural topics, such as plant types and plant identification, soil improvement, invasive control, shrub and herbaceous planting, and maintenance techniques. The top two performers, Floyd Backus and Jeffrey Berry, were selected to continue as full-time employees of the Delaware Center for Horticulture (DCH) through the fall season.

Partners with DCH in this innovative project include the Delaware Department of Labor, Department of Corrections, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, Delaware Solid Waste Authority, Wilmington Department of Public Works, 3rd District Neighborhood Planning Council, Kerns Brothers Tree Service, Representative Hazel Plant, Senator Margaret Rose Henry, and a handful of local civic associations.

Northeast Wilmington is among the lowest percentage of tree canopy coverage neighborhoods in the city. People who live in this part of town are also predominantly low-income. The constant dust, air pollution and lack of shade are palpable indicators of why this mixed industrial/residential area has been designated by DCH as a top priority for additional trees.

DCH has carefully designed the new landscaping along 12th Street to support large shade trees and to improve stormwater drainage. Larger trees typically stand a better chance of surviving and provide significantly greater environmental services such as cleaning the air. The trees for this project have been selected as species suitable to urban conditions.

One of Floyd and Jeffrey's most important responsibilities since the conclusion of the training program has been watering and nurturing the 150 new trees along 12th Street. The two men have also been sprucing up other public spaces throughout the city. They have weeded and mulched numerous planting beds in traffic islands and city parks. They braved the heat and passing vehicles in the middle of Delaware Avenue to bring water to fragile new transplants. They replaced trees that had failed in various street tree pits. They installed bumper blocks in parking lots to protect trees from trucks. They improved Trolley Square by installing new plants and mulch along the sidewalk, and worked with an arborist to safely fell several trees along the railroad embankment.

Floyd and Jeffrey have been learning new skills each week. Their excitement about being provided this unusual job training opportunity has been demonstrated through a cheerful enthusiasm for every task, no matter how physically demanding. They frequently express their personal satisfaction for improving the city and interacting with the public on a daily basis. The staff of DCH have been extremely pleased with the high quality of the work that these two men have been delivering.

Governor Markell's administration has identified job training and strong re-entry programs as key solutions for positive reintegration of ex-offenders back into the community. Several of the men in the original pilot green jobs project have families based in the neighborhood where the 150 trees were installed. As the men developed marketable skills, they were also able to enhance their home neighborhoods and build their self-esteem.

Photos from the job training program or interviews with the people mentioned in this release are available upon request.

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The **Delaware Center for Horticulture (DCH)** cultivates greener communities by inspiring appreciation and improvement of the environment through horticulture, education and conservation. Founded in 1977, the Center's site in Trolley Square includes a 1.5 acre educational demonstration garden, a 3,000 volume lending library, an art gallery, a lecture hall and a greenhouse. DCH supports 16 active community gardens throughout the city of Wilmington; organizes park improvement projects, beautifies Delaware's roadsides with native vegetation; maintains the landscaping of many urban gateways, corridors, and streetscapes; leads regional conservation projects to enhance Delaware's urban forests; and provides educational programs for children, teens, and adults. For more information, visit www.dehort.org