

www.pps.org. City Parks Alliance is a coalition of city parks leaders working together to strengthen America's urban parks; it sponsors international conferences on the subject and maintains an Internet list of national job openings in city parks across the nation. Its members include representatives from public agencies and park departments from around the country. For more information, consult the CPA's Web site at www.cityparksalliance.org. The Trust for Public Land is another national organization working to protect the American landscape. Its Parks for People initiative organizes efforts in cities and suburbs across the country to ensure that everyone can enjoy access to a nearby park, playground, or natural area. In New York City, the Trust was a major player in saving many community gardens in the 1990s. You can contact them through their Web site at www.tpl.org.

Finding Advocates in Your Community

Dedicated people with a commitment to the public good can be found in every community large or small; your job is to find them, persuade them of the importance of public space for quality of life, and invite them to join your efforts. Spread the word among your friends and colleagues. Assemble some prominent people from your community who



The Delaware Center for Horticulture works with city and community groups in Wilmington to sponsor and organize street plantings. Photo by Gary Schwetz. Courtesy Delaware Center for Horticulture.

are interested in improving public space, research the issues, and show your elected officials that their constituents are concerned. Aim to mobilize community leaders behind parks issues. Important businesspeople, politicians, clergy, educators, CEOs, newspaper editors, and labor leaders can make a big difference when they advocate for parks with city officials. Because parks issues are nonpartisan and should remain so, civic leaders of any party can become parks advocates. Be sure that you keep them well briefed; when the opportunity arises, they should already know just what funds to seek.

The support of well-known people—even celebrities—can sometimes produce amazing results. In 1995 Bette Midler, “The Divine Miss M,” appalled by the conditions of some of the parks in the Harlem area and parts of the Bronx, started the nonprofit organization New York Restoration Project to “restore, develop, and revitalize underserved parks, community gardens, and open space.”¹⁰ Since then, NYRP has restored many of the parks in northern Manhattan, created new green spaces, saved numerous community gardens, and made an impressive commitment to ongoing maintenance. Beyond a doubt, Bette Midler’s high profile and passion for the cause have helped to bring attention to the issue of underserved parks in poor areas.

In Wilmington, Delaware (population 72,664), the mayor, Jim Baker, is also committed to this cause. In 2004, he and the city council formed the Wilmington Beautification Commission, asking city employees, businesses, and citizens to join a citywide campaign whose slogan was “Think Green for a Change.” The commission is a coalition of prominent local institutions, such as Winterthur and the Delaware Center for Horticulture, along with city agencies and community activists, working together with the mayor to enhance city parks and public spaces. The focus is on maintenance, and Mayor Baker has also allocated generous funds for improvement of plantings. The Delaware Center for Horticulture, with its long history of working with community groups to transform city spaces, is taking the lead in this effort. (For more information about this campaign, see the Resource Directory.)

Getting Out the Word

As a parks advocate, one of your most important functions is keeping people informed. Observe and document the actual conditions of as



Wilmington's mayor, James Baker, is also a believer in the value of beautification. His message welcomes you when you enter the city. Photo by Gary Schwetz. Courtesy Delaware Center for Horticulture.