

New York Restoration Project (NYRP)
Report to the New York – New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program
Final Report – 2005 Mini-Grants
Harlem River Festival – September 24, 2005



Above, from left: At the New York Restoration Project Harlem River Festival on September 24, 2005, New York City youngsters row on the Harlem River in a Whitehall rowboat; Philip Coffin, Education Director, teaches children how to seine for fish; Juan Acosta, Environmental Educator, conducts an oyster gardening demonstration.

Audience and Objectives

The New York Restoration Project held its annual Harlem River Festival on September 24, 2005 at Swindler Cove Park in upper Manhattan on the western shore of the Harlem River.

Our target audience was local families and youth from Washington Heights, Inwood, and throughout the five boroughs of New York City. Many residents of the New York metropolitan area—including those who live in very close proximity to the Harlem River—are unaware of its importance as a vital part of the Harbor Estuary. NYRP utilized the festival as an opportunity to introduce local residents to Swindler Cove Park and the vibrant estuarine ecology of the Harlem River. We sought to provide festival attendees with a greater understanding of and appreciation for the estuary through hands-on aquatic science activities, such as rowing, seining for fish, and conducting oyster gardening and water quality testing demonstrations on the Manhattan shore the Harlem River. NYRP was pleased by the festival's attendance, which was approximately 300 people, and the variety of activities, as well as by the level of excitement and learning that characterized attendees' experiences.

Partnerships

When planning the festival, NYRP also sought to purposefully link our celebration of the river's habitat to the resurgence of rowing on the Harlem River exemplified by the Head of the Harlem Regatta event, which kicked off the day's festivities at 8:00 a.m. and continued throughout the afternoon at the Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse at Swindler Cove Park to the delight of festival attendees. This was the first regatta to take place on the Harlem River in decades. Athletic pursuits centered on the river would have been unthinkable in the past, as the river was considered dangerous and much too polluted to be a setting for aquatic recreation. Now that the river's condition has been much improved, it has become an enjoyable setting for education and recreation alike.

We also partnered with Floating the Apple, a New York City-based nonprofit that focuses on reintroducing the public, especially young people, to the joys of rowing and sailing on urban waters. Mary Nell Hawk, a Floating the Apple volunteer, and five additional youth volunteers led small groups in Whitehall rowboats which were built through NYRP's boatbuilding program. Throughout the afternoon we served more than 50 people with rowing excursions on the Harlem River and the Sherman Creek inlet. Three high school students from the YouthCaN program, based at the American Museum of Natural History, also participated in the day's activities and assisted NYRP educators with rowing, as well as seining, water quality testing, and oyster gardening demonstrations. Five special needs student volunteers from I.S. 143, accompanied by their teacher Obed Fulcar, set up a display about their Harlem River-based environmental education activities.

Evaluation

As the festival was held while the Harlem River was at high tide, we opted to reschedule our Swindler Cove shoreline cleanup originally planned as a part of the festival, for October 1. This cleanup day will be hosted in coordination with the American Littoral Society (ALS) and will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the New York State Beach Cleanup. As we could not offer the interpretive mudflats walk for the same reason, we have scheduled two related programs: on Saturday, October 8 NYRP will host a Swindler Cove Park and Sherman Creek Clean-Up; on Saturday, December 10 there will be another walk that focuses on Harlem River Water Quality at Swindler Cove Park. To address any concerns about tidal conditions in preparation for next year's event, we will carefully investigate available charts.

To make sure that all can easily get to Swindler Cove Park and are aware of subway service irregularities, we will include a link to the MTA New York City Transit web page on our flyers and in our electronic newsletter announcement and provide the agency's phone number as well.

For next year's event, which will celebrate National Estuaries Day 2006, NYRP plans to further encourage current, past, and prospective educator participants in NYRP's teacher training workshops to attend the event for enrichment purposes. It is our hope that as we attract more educators to Swindler Cove Park, we will increase park visitorship, both for environmental education field trips and leisure activities. We also plan to further encourage coordination with our partner organizations by scheduling additional planning sessions.

Outreach

To reach our target audience and create local and citywide interest in the Harlem River Festival, Jane Jackson, NYRP's Director of Programming, and her staff contacted a variety of external media outlets, including newspapers (*The Harlem Times*), as well as magazines (*The New Yorker* and *Time Out New York*). Jackson also posted details about the festival on the following web sites: washington-heights.us, www.GoCityKids.com, and NYRP's web site, www.nyrp.org. NYRP placed a half-page paid advertisement in the Manhattan Times (readership 40,000) to reach a wider segment of the community than may have been familiar with NYRP's mission and activities.

NYRP also distributed flyers around Washington Heights/Inwood, and dropped off stacks of them at schools, churches, libraries, and police precincts. The flyer was also included in Community Board 12's monthly mailing, which is sent to Washington Heights residents. Ms. Jackson e-mailed event details and flyers to her professional contacts at local community organizations and schools, as well as to Waterwire, the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance's popular e-mail newsletter that focuses on local waterfront development and activities, and the Inwood Community e-mail list. Additionally, to reach out to existing NYRP constituents, information about the event was included in our bi-monthly electronic newsletter, which was sent to a database of individual e-mail addresses and reached more than 2,500 households.

Documentation

Please see the enclosed outreach flyers, which NYRP produced in both English and Spanish. We also distributed HEP educational posters to families and educators at the festival, saving a few as resources for our educational programs. Visual aids such as these are excellent tools to reinforce outdoor learning curricula.

For more information, please contact:

Jane Jackson	or	Susan Madden
Director of Programming		Director of Development
New York Restoration Project		New York Restoration Project
31 West 56 th Street		31 West 56 th Street
New York, NY 10019		New York, NY 10019
212-333-2552 phone		212-333-2552 phone
212-333-3886 fax		212-333-3886 fax
jjackson@nyrp.org		smadden@nyrp.org
www.nyrp.org		www.nyrp.org