



New York Restoration Project (NYRP) – History

A SEED IS PLANTED...

In 1995, New York City experienced a revolution that would change its landscape – quite literally – forever... and for the better. Returning to the city that helped launch her celebrated career, famed entertainer Bette Midler found many of its streets, neighborhoods and parks consumed by a sea of litter and years of neglect.

"I was so upset; I didn't sleep for weeks... People were throwing their garbage out the window, leaving their lunches on the ground. Finally, I realized I needed to actually do something – even if it meant picking up trash with my own two hands."

Bette Midler, from an interview with *Good Housekeeping Magazine*

And, that she did. A figurative force of nature in the entertainment world, The Divine Miss M also proved to be a literal force of nature in protecting and preserving New York City's public spaces and parks. Initially recruiting friends and family, Bette set about removing garbage from Fort Tryon Park and Fort Washington Park in Upper Manhattan. What began as a grass roots effort led to her founding the non-profit New York Restoration Project (NYRP). The organization soon established itself not only by making a visual difference, but also a social impact – particularly in under-resourced neighborhoods located throughout the city's five boroughs. In addition, NYRP set the standard for greening efforts in New York City as a key player and partner with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation and others in what was, at that time, the very beginning of a greening "ecolution."

OUR ROOTS EXPAND...

In 1999, then-New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani announced plans to sell 114 community gardens to developers in order to help fund city budget shortfalls. Bette and NYRP quickly rallied and raised the money necessary to save these precious plots from destruction – working with the Trust for Public Land and other like-minded non-profits to ensure these community treasures would remain public gardens in perpetuity.

This additional act of intervention by The Divine Miss M heralded a new era in NYRP's commitment to the belief that clean, green neighborhoods are fundamental to our quality of life and that every community in New York City deserves an oasis of natural beauty. An investment that has since changed the face of the city, NYRP now owns and manages 55 community gardens throughout the five boroughs and works every day to promote the revitalized health of the neighborhoods these gardens serve.

Working together, NYRP staff, AmeriCorps members and countless corporate and community volunteers have planted hundreds of thousands of trees, shrubs and flowers to support the restoration and maintenance of NYRP's community gardens, as well as four New York City parks – resulting in the removal of nearly 2,000 tons of garbage from the city's green spaces. NYRP also continues to effectively engage New York City residents in the long-term stewardship of their open spaces, instilling in them – and generations to come – a desire to ensure that all the beautiful green gains made since our founding do not fall into new neglect.

BRANCHING OUT...

NYRP is also responsible for transforming an illegal dumping ground along the Harlem River into the beautiful, five-acre Swindler Cove Park, located in northern Manhattan. Begun as a shore cleanup more than 10 years ago, NYRP's Swindler Cove campus – which opened to the public in 2003 – now encompasses the Riley-Levin Children's Garden, additional development along Sherman Creek, NYRP's Cherry Tree Project along the Harlem River Drive and the Peter Jay Sharp Boathouse – the first community boathouse on the Harlem River in 100 years and where the sport of competitive rowing has been reintroduced to neighborhood youth through a number of NYRP and co-sponsor programs.

Today, Swindler Cove Park is a centerpiece of NYRP's outdoor educational and community outreach efforts and is home to NYRP's Nature in My Neighborhood environmental education curricula, NatureMania Spring Break and Summer Camp – programs serving thousands of New York City families and at-risk youth. At Swindler Cove Park and in NYRP's 55 community gardens, New Yorkers are being introduced every day to the importance of respecting green space and spending quality time in nature in urban settings.

AN URBAN FOREST GROWS...

On Earth Day in April of 2007, New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg unveiled PlaNYC, an extensive and ambitious 127-point vision to strengthen the city's urban environment and make New York a model 21st-century metropolis by creating a more sustainable city by the year 2030.

PlaNYC focuses on every facet of the city's physical environment – its transportation and energy networks; housing; land and park systems; and water supply and air quality. As one of the plan's major propositions, MillionTreesNYC was formed to revitalize New York City's urban forest by planting and caring for one million new trees throughout the city's five boroughs by 2017. To accomplish this ambitious goal, NYRP Founder Bette Midler joined forces with Mayor Bloomberg and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation – becoming a co-leader in this sweeping initiative.

In just two short years, MillionTreesNYC has become a citywide movement that continues to engage and energize New York City home and land owners, developers and businesses – encouraging individuals, neighborhood-based organizations, companies, city agencies and others to re-imagine and advocate for a more sustainable New York City through expansion and maintenance of its critical tree canopy. NYRP and its members, in partnership with the

city's Parks Department, are not only changing the city's landscape, but are also changing the mindset of New Yorkers by leading planting efforts for one million trees and helping all to learn to respect and maintain this most precious New York City resource – our urban forest.

In its relatively short history, NYRP has learned that restoring a public space is only the first – and perhaps easiest – step in the long process involved in promoting greening and stewardship within urban communities. To affect and sustain real change, it will take every New Yorker working together for the city's greater good. While we celebrate the successes of NYRP's first 14 years, we know that our work is far from done and that it will take the collective strength of all New Yorkers digging in and contributing to effectively change the fabric of our neighborhoods for the better and for future generations.