

## 2015 Sustainable Land Care Training

*By Nicolas Esposito*

This May marked the halfway point for the Philadelphia Parks & Recreation 2015 Sustainable Land Care<sup>1</sup> Training. This certified training course was designed by PPR staff and Operations primarily for our Grounds Maintenance Worker 1, Recreation Facility Caretaker 1 and Seasonal Maintenance Attendant staff members who serve on the front lines of our land care operations every day. Keeping with PPR's commitment to equip and educate our staff in the latest land care techniques, as well as our intention to provide opportunities for advancement, this training builds off of existing experience and introduces 21<sup>st</sup> century techniques to ensure that PPR is on the sustainable path to ensure our department ethic of "Safe, Clean and Ready to Use" landscapes.

In late 2014, Executive Staff realized the reinvestment that needed to be made in our grounds maintenance staff and began developing the training. As Deputy Mayor DiBerardinis explained, "Our goal for this training was to advance the practices of the department. But the even greater opportunity was the focus on sustainability because if we don't address the threats to our natural environment now, we're going to pay dearly for it later, both as a department and a city."

The department asked former staff trainer and former PowerCorps Project Manager Nic Esposito to develop and lead the training. "I felt that this was a powerful opportunity to take the really innovative techniques that people are using on landscapes across the country, in both the public and private sectors, and train our staff in those techniques," said Esposito. "And I'm so happy to be working with these groups of staff. Although all of our staff is important, I feel that it all starts with the people who are doing the work on the ground, and I hope to be able to work with much more of our staff in the future." Esposito worked with Operations staff—most notably Chris Palmer, Sue Buck, Paul Dignam, as well as Stewardship Director Barb McCabe—to plan and execute the trainings.

The six-month training has targeted a total of 130 staff members among the three designations of SMA, RFC 1 and GMW 1, with a different topic focused on each month. In March, attendees were introduced to the concepts and definitions of sustainability and received a presentation by the Mayor's Office of Sustainability on the City's GreenWorks Plan. But the most important aspect of the training, according to Esposito, was the feedback provided by attendees on sustainability that

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Land Care is an accountable and consistent system for Philadelphia Parks & Recreation to maintain urban parks, recreation centers, playgrounds and natural land areas by conserving resources such as energy and water, recycling organic and inorganic material into renewable resources, maintaining aesthetically pleasing and functional landscapes within the surrounding eco-system, and educating the public on how to be better environmental stewards all in an effort to enhance our work and our landscapes.



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already exists in the department. This included everything from not idling trucks, turning off lights in centers and conserving resources like trash bags and cleaning supplies. This became even more interesting when Esposito found out that many in our department keep their own gardens, are very conscious about the resources they use and the products they buy, and that one person was even a beekeeper.

In the April training, attendees got a primer on garden design and planting techniques with help from representatives of Farm Philly and Tree Philly, pruning practice with members of the Tree Keepers, and a refining of observational skills with the Standards Unit. In May, attendees did a round robin training of chainsaws, string trimmers and ball field equipment with District Supervisor staff, as well as a very important safety presentation from Director of Safety Keith Freeman.

With three more trainings in store, we as a department are looking forward to seeing the skills that our grounds maintenance crews gain as well as the connections they are making to each other and others in the department.



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