

RING News

Riverside-Inwood Neighborhood Garden



December 2007 Volume 17 Issue 3

In cooperation with Our Lady Queen of Martyrs School

RING: A Garden of Specialists

by Maggie Clarke

The RING organization (RINGO?) was born in late 1983 at a meeting set up by Assemblyman Brian Murtaugh to determine what to do with the then empty lot at Riverside and Payson. I said, "Maybe we could throw some wildflower seeds on it," and by meeting's end I was co-chair of a community garden.

It took another year for RING's name, mission, and current structure to be established – that is, RING would become a botanical garden, with no plots or veggies, planned by and cared for by the group as a whole. Since then we worked hard to establish the garden at Payson and Riverside, which won two citywide Mollie Parnis Dress Up Your Neighborhood awards in three years, then to be bulldozed by the private owner in late 1987. With money and services from city and state officials, the Parks Department, Trust for Public Land and Columbia Presbyterian, the Triangle garden was established in early 1990 with the same mission and structure as the first garden.

The biggest challenge for RING has been to encourage and coordinate the efforts of many members, who are not compelled or required to volunteer so that all the tasks that need doing get done. The many 'plots and veggies' gardens usually require those who have a plot to provide a certain number of hours to communal garden tasks. Over the years, RING has evolved into a garden of specialists, who become expert at the things they like to do and volunteer for those tasks, sometimes teaching those skills to others. For some tasks this has worked out really well. *Continued on page 2*



Some gardeners say the difference between weeds and flowers is the flowers are the easiest ones to pull out. Licia Stroub (pictured above), Paul Sanner, Arthur Sherry, and Maggie Clarke pulled out weeds measuring four to seven feet tall from the garden this summer.

Holiday Tree & Menorah Lighting

Mark the weekend of December 8-9 for RING's annual holiday celebration. We kick off the festivities by decorating the tree in the garden. We have the decorations, but we need some helping hands to put them on the tree.

Next, bring your holiday cheer as we light the tree and menorah. As we light up the winter evening in the garden, enjoy cookies and cake and warm up your singing voice with hot cocoa and cider. We'll provide the song sheets. Bring along a flashlight and join us for our winter garden party. Everyone is welcome!

Tree Decorating

Sat, December 8 from 11:00-1:00

rain date: Sun, December 9 from 2:00-4:00

Tree and Menorah Lighting

Sun, December 9 from 4:30-6:00



Inside RING News

RING: A Garden of Specialists	page 1
Holiday Tree & Menorah Lighting	page 1
Conversation with Jennifer Hoppa	page 3
Make Music New York	page 3
Inwood Street Trees Project	page 4
A Word about Composting	page 5



RING: A Garden of Specialists

Continued from page 1

Juan Leal has become RING's polyurethaneer, coming out regularly to apply protective coatings to our shed, signs, and benches. Joan Keener has led the Inwood Street Trees effort, Eleanore Anderson has been keeping our local businesses stocked with our brochure, and Nancy Beltrez has for many years been our Flea Market director. Liz Popiel created and runs our Art In The Garden exhibition every year. We are very grateful. If you would like to help them or volunteer for (and get trained in) any other task, please contact me (212-567-8272).

But because RING does not require volunteerism, too few step forward to take on too many tasks, and they sometimes get burned out. Arthur Sherry has been RING's carpenter, solar expert, pond expert, and watering system expert, shouldering much of the responsibility for all those things for many years. Many tasks go undone year after year. For example, the wisteria are still strangling the trumpet vines and are growing up the nearby tree. They need annual pruning. Arthur really needs some people to volunteer to help him with all these things. For several years Jessica Stretton was RING's treasurer, banker, database manager, and keymeister. When she retired from the planning committee, four of us replaced her (explaining the delays that sometimes occur as communications are now more complicated). Martia Gordon has been the Potluck dinner coordinator for some time, but she can definitely use some volunteers so we can have more than one or two dinners per year. The planning committee has had no secretary for years, so that falls to me. Gardening specialists seem to wax and wane from year to year. Subspecialties can include pruning, weeding, watering, lawn care, composting, planting, and more. Historically, the only way that volunteers could learn these skills and know what is needed to be done at any given time would be to come out either when Arthur or myself were there. This has limited the number of members who learn the skills and volunteer to garden. Composting has recently become a popular specialty, and since I put several pages of

composting instructions on our website (www.ringgarden.org), it is my hope that this group might, one day, become organized and self-sustaining. What we really need are a few more 'garden supervisors', who know from experience at any given moment (1) what the top gardening priorities are, (2) how to do the tasks to accomplish these, and (3) how to teach these skills to volunteers. For example, in the dead of summer, when it hasn't rained for days and the plants are wilting, the top priority is watering. If the plants aren't wilting, but it's been raining and the weeds are crawling up the fence, trees, and strangling the evergreens and flowering plants, weeding is the priority. Garden sitters, who open the garden and greet visitors, serve a very important function, since the Parks Department requires RING to be open at least 10 hours per week at advertised times.

For most of RING's existence, I've been the sole or main grant writer, government and organizational liaison, volunteer coordinator, webmaster, newsletter editor, and publicist. In recent months Martin Collins has helped with the liaison function and Rhonda Asher has assisted with the last few *RING News*. Though we need help in the publicity, grant writing, bookkeeping, and web departments, and our database manager would like to be relieved of duty, it is the Volunteer Coordinator specialty that we really need the most help with, since many members indicate their interest in volunteering when they sign up, but we don't have a mechanism to get back to them. A Volunteer Coordinator would be someone who would work with those on the planning committee to find out what needs doing, and then make the phone calls to make things happen.

All of this may seem overwhelming, but if most RING members were to choose just one area of specialty that they enjoy, RING would hum along ever so much better. I'll put a list of volunteer tasks and niches up on our website under Volunteer at RING. Please take a look and let us know if you'd like to help. The garden will thank you for it.



A Conversation with Jennifer Hoppa

Deputy Director of Northern Manhattan Parks

by Martin Collins

I recently spoke with Jennifer Hoppa, Deputy Director of Northern Manhattan Parks and neighborhood resident, about the Riverside Inwood Neighborhood Garden (RING) and Washington Heights-Inwood parks.

What are your thoughts Jennifer when someone mentions RING?

RING is a wonderful community garden, a beautiful green oasis that reminds me of other gardens in the City such as those on the lower east side and the Honigman community garden in Chelsea-Clinton. RING was the impetus for the green streets getting done in Inwood and the Parks Department just installed new sidewalks around the RING. I would like in the future to see the RING post expanded, fixed hours of operation and open more frequently.

How have programs such as the Uptown Arts Stroll, and more recently the Children's Festival of Russian Culture and events in High Bridge enhanced parks in Washington Heights-Inwood?

The programs have enriched the community and brought more people to our parks. The Parks Department also has a temporary public arts program that very few artists take advantage of; the permit application is on the parks website (www.nycgovparks.org). Applications go through a public review process that includes the community board, director of arts & antiquities, commissioner, borough commissioner and the first deputy mayor.

I would like to see Fort Washington Park and the waterfront from the Little Red Lighthouse to Dyckman Street house a six-month art installation; it's a fabulous backdrop overlooking the Palisades and the Hudson River that will encourage more people to visit this area and make it safer. The arts stroll's lampshade project was a great idea using the Broadway promenade in Fort Tryon Park where the Parks Department is currently installing new sidewalks and benches. Public art is a great vehicle for activating that whole promenade. In High Bridge Park, the giraffe project was another great use of art in the public realm.

continued on page 5



Make Music New York

by Arthur Sherry

On June 21, 2007 the RING Garden participated in a world-wide event celebrating the summer solstice. For Make Music New York, professional and amateur musicians and other performance artists took to the streets to play and entertain for free. La Fete de Musique started in Paris 25 years ago with a small group of jazz musicians taking to the streets in their neighborhood. It was a hit with the people and the event grew from there to encompass over 100 cities around the world - Bangkok, Berlin, Grenoble, Rome, Rio and of course, Paris. It was not until last year that a US city, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, took up the ball and started to celebrate. New York became the second US city this year and we hope many others will follow suit.

In the RING Garden we assembled a small but dedicated group of musicians who intrepidly braved the oncoming rain to get out and play. For about an hour out of the planned three hours, we shared our music and friendship until thundershowers called an abrupt halt to the festivities. We hope to have more musical events in 2008.



Inwood Street Trees Project

by Joan Keener

Two years ago, R.I.N.G. president, Maggie Clarke, obtained a grant from Green Links to fund an outreach and stewardship program to get 25 new trees planted along commercial streets in Inwood. While the Department of Parks & Recreation plants trees for free, most businesses are not aware how to go about requesting one, and when trees are planted, many die before reaching maturity because of inadequate stewardship. Inwood Street Trees Project combined using

R.I.N.G. members to connect shopkeepers who wanted trees with Parks and involving the students of local Our Lady Queen of Martyrs School (as well as R.I.N.G. volunteers) in tree stewardship.

In the spring and fall of 2006, with colorful brochures in hand and visions of a green canopied streets in mind, R.I.N.G. members Ruth Bechhofer and Joan Keener canvassed businesses along Dyckman, Broadway, and Sherman and obtained signatures for 17 trees, which they forwarded to the Parks Dept.

Accomplishments

By the end of November 2006, there were eight new trees planted along Dyckman Street, including two American Lindens, a Honey Locust, two Callery Pears, and a Flowering Cherry. In May 2007, seven more trees were planted, among them, a beautiful Japanese Zelkova in front of 4761 Broadway, a Pin Oak in front of the Check Cashing business across the street.

In May and early June, students from OLQM helped clear the tree pits of garbage, planted flowers, and put up signs encouraging pedestrians to keep dogs and debris away. During the summer, Maggie and I periodically checked in with shopkeepers to encourage watering when tree pits looked dry, and I have weeded and cultivated all the new tree pits along Dyckman.

Assessment and Future Goals

With only two outreach volunteers signing up businesses, we did well with the tree-planting portion of

the project, but were less-good in coordinating follow-up on tree care. However, since Mayor Bloomberg announced his goal of planting one million new trees by 2030, there's fantastic new interest from Parks in

tree-planting/tree-stewardship programs like ours; Partnership for Parks actually came uptown to tour our new tree sites and talk to me, and it offers tree-care workshops that provide free tools to participants (go to [www. partnershipforparks.org](http://www.partnershipforparks.org) to sign up). I was told that they especially want to partner with groups that have shown they can successfully organize local tree stewards.

Though our project is in the fledgling stages (with only two adult participants, we could not keep on top of every tree, and one, in front of Express Drugs, has died), with our neighbors' help, I know we can do much more. With the Mayor's initiative, we have fantastic opportunity to change the face of noisy, crowded streets like Dyckman forever. So, if you love the soft rustle of trees, the clean air they provide, and their green canopy, we need you (especially Spanish-speakers) to help us with the next round of outreach.

Please contact Joan Keener at joankeener@gmail.com to find out how to get involved.

“The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit.” ~ *Nelson Henderson*

Are you interested in helping RING run more efficiently? Would you like to have input into decisions about event scheduling and planning what to buy, what to plant? Can you help with things like publicity of the garden and its events? Would you like to make a greater contribution to making the garden look nice, or to train others how to garden? These are but a few of the things that we talk about at RING planning meetings and people often create their own helpful niches. If you are interested, please let me know: Maggie Clarke -(212) 567-8272 or mclarke@hunter.cuny.edu



A Word About Composting

by Maggie Clarke

We're very pleased that many RINGers and other neighbors have been bringing kitchen organics to the composters. Here are some pointers to remember:

* Cut up your vegetables, fruits, eggshells, coffee grounds etc. Pieces should be no more than 2" in length. You can rip up the paper bag you bring them in and throw that in, too, but please take the time to spread out the cut-up organics in the bins. Otherwise, it takes forever to decompose.

* You can use any of the three composters for your food organics, but fill them only up to ¾ full as it is hard to mix the compost otherwise. It's best to have about half kitchen organics and half dry leaves. Please add dry leaves to the tumblers if there's a lot of kitchen organics. We keep dry leaves near the water fountain, and in fall, in black bags in that area. (There are some yellow jackets that hang out in the wire leaf cages sometimes, so use a shovel.)

* Please use the long handled screw tool to mix the compost. The bacteria that are breaking the organics down need oxygen. You screw the tool in a few times then pull up to mix it.

* If the compost is dry, add water. The bacteria need water. I've hooked up a light green hose which is operable by turning a blue spigot under the arbor during the season. In winter (Nov - April) there are buckets to catch rainwater, or you can bring some with you.

* The more we can do these things, the faster that rich black humus accumulates at the bottom of the composters. Shovel it out and sift it with the coarse sifter (open the large green tote and put the sifter over it). Coarse sifted compost can be used to enrich the tree pits outside the garden. Sift again using the fine sifters and you can spread on the lawn and in flower beds.

We're trying to identify contributors to RING's composting program. If you compost, would you mind writing me to say how often you add materials and if you mix, water and/or sift. We welcome volunteers to the Composting Committee. mclarke@hunter.edu



Every gardener knows that under the cloak of winter lies a miracle...a seed waiting to sprout, a bulb opening to the light, a bud straining to unfurl. And the anticipation nurtures our dream. ~ Barbara Winkler

A Conversation with Jennifer Hoppa
continued from page 3

How valuable have the community visioning sessions been for Riverside and Fort Washington Park?

The community board plays a crucial role in collecting neighborhood input. PlanYC also did extensive outreach by surveying community residents. Together these efforts allow for the creation of a comprehensive and collective master plan for Riverside and Fort Washington Park, which gives us the necessary information to prioritize projects, outreach to public officials for funding and apply for grants.

What projects in Washington Heights-Inwood have been the most gratifying in your five years with the Parks Department?

PlanYC and the administration's recognition and \$100 million commitment to Northern Manhattan parks is a giant step forward for Washington Heights-Inwood. Certainly, with 30% of the neighborhood's population under age 18 the mountain biking trail is very important; it's the first one in New York City and I'm proud that it's in Washington Heights. The Sherman Creek street-ends along the Harlem River (from West 202nd to 206th Street) is another project that I'm proud of since the Parks Department won an Arts Commission award for its outstanding design.



Thank you!

RING thanks the students from Our Lady Queen of Martyrs School for their continued work in the garden!



Wintertime at RING



Join us for RING's annual holiday celebration!

TREE DECORATING

Saturday, December 8 from 11:00am-1:00pm

rain date: Sunday December 9 from 2:00-4:00pm



TREE AND MENORAH LIGHTING

Sunday, December 9 from 4:30-6:00pm



REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED

Everyone is welcome! See inside for more details.

RING is on the web: www.ringgarden.org



RING
Maggie Clarke, PhD
1795 Riverside Drive #5F
New York NY 10034

First Class



Join us for RING's Holiday Tree & Menorah Lighting!

details inside