

A Community Building & Environmental Organization

New Beginnings



Tyese Boyer uses IDA savings to buy first home.



Getting ready to plow the Chestnut Street Garden.

Isles Children's Garden Wins Top National Prize

IN A NATIONAL COMPETITION OF THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA, ISLES' PERRY STREET CHILDREN'S GARDEN HAS RECEIVED THE FIRST PRIZE FOUNDERS FUND AWARD.

In partnership with Isles, the Princeton and Trenton Garden Clubs submitted the project for a vote by Garden Club of America membership. Commenting on the award, Julia Garry, President of the Princeton Garden Club, said, *"Ultimately there is nothing as compelling as trying to better the lives of children in compromised neighborhoods."*

The Founders Fund Award has been a program of the Garden Club of America since 1934. It supports projects that "... restore, improve, and protect the environment through educational programs and action in the fields of conservation and civic improvement."

The \$25,000 award will enable Isles to install native plantings, paths, and trellises to frame and shade a new meeting and teaching area in the Children's Garden, located at the intersection of Route 1 and Perry Street. The project is part of a more comprehensive restoration of both the garden and the adjacent Roberto Clemente Park funded by a grant from the NJ DEP Green Acres Program and undertaken in partnership with the City of Trenton.

ISLES' 18TH ANNUAL Midsummer House & Garden Tour

Saturday, June 25th
4:00pm-8:00pm

Isles
10 Wood Street, Trenton



Visit our gardens, meet community gardeners,
see rehabilitated homes & enjoy a delicious meal.

For more information, contact
Wendy Browne at 609-341-4716

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

AmeriCorps Members Support Isles' Projects

These men and women, ages 18-48, bring educational backgrounds from GEDs to bachelors degrees, and educational aspirations from finishing college degrees to attaining masters degrees. Recently some of them shared their thoughts with us.

Why did you become an AmeriCorps member?

"Because I wanted to make a difference in the community."

"I wanted something different to do."

"I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself."

"To work in my community and to receive an educational award."

What's the best part of your day as an AmeriCorps member working at Isles?

"When I see the YouthBuild trainees come through the door in the morning."
"Being able to help someone."

What's the best part about being an AmeriCorps member?

"Knowing that I am a part of a national movement and being able to help in the community."
"Serving the community."

What has being an AmeriCorps member taught you about yourself?

"That I needed to be more humble."

"It has taught me to be more patient and open to new experiences and people."

"That I can be anything I set out to be."

"To have more confidence in myself."

ISLES OVER 24 YEARS

- 425 homes (\$42,000,000 invested)
- 170 gardens
- 1,500 families counseled on home ownership
- 500 trainees in YouthBuild
- 1,000+ street trees planted
- 225 homes tested for lead
- 200 families counseled for asthma management
- 500 youth in recreation and nutrition programs
- 15,000 youth and teachers in environmental education
- Park redevelopment, neighborhood plans, brownfield cleanups...

CANAL BANKS UPDATE

Isles Focuses Much of its Work on the Canal Banks Community in Trenton

Over the past eighteen months, Isles' work in the Canal Banks area has included:

• **Breaking ground** for the third and last phase of Monument Crossing

• **Completing** and selling all 22 homes on Bellevue Avenue

• **Helping** to organize the Hanover Street Civic Association, which meets monthly and is in the process of developing priorities for their neighborhood

• **Graduating** 67 Canal Banks residents from homebuyer education classes

• **Providing** financial literacy training to 48 youths

• **Enrolling** 23 families in IDAs (Individual Development Accounts)

• **Providing** Parents Empowering Parents (PEP) sessions for 53 parents

• **Providing** facilitator training for 12 parents

• **Training** 6 PEP parents as Healthy Home Assessors

• **Providing** technical assistance and training to Monument Crossing homeowners as they formed their Homeowner's Association

• **Completing** a neighborhood revitalization plan for Capital Health Systems

Trenton Housing Authority participants who completed financial literacy training.



Message to our Friends

Dear Friends,

Spring is here and with it the invigoration and excitement of good works breaking ground. Gardens being planted, houses built, new environmental projects unfolding, and many more activities energize us. In addition, the Career Center graduation is set for June 23, and our 18th Annual House and Garden Dinner Tour is scheduled for Saturday, June 25.

Isles on-the-ground projects are vital and visible, but we think the real magic to Isles work – and our ability to impact the world – is in the learning. What works, what doesn't? How much should it cost? How can communities develop over time? How are we sharing what we've learned? We are increasingly investing in research, mapping, training, and education (read the articles on page 5). Partnerships with local higher education institutions take us where we could not go alone, while exposing students and faculty to new ideas and approaches to improving community life and the environment.

At least eight college students will be interning at Isles this summer. We benefit from their energy, hard work, and youthful questions. They typically take away important lessons about this social entrepreneur career path and themselves.

In addition, Isles is pleased to host other researchers, including Pavel Ullman, an architect and Rutgers visiting fellow from Prague, Czechoslovakia. Pavel is working on a large potential "green" development project. A group of Princeton University Woodrow Wilson School graduate students helped complete a community plan for the Old Trenton neighborhood. Rutgers University Bloustein School graduate students looked at food security concerns in Trenton, with a focus on access to quality food and its impact on nutrition.

We look forward to dissecting the lessons on the last 24 years and sharing them with others wanting to develop similar organizations. Maybe they won't have to make all the mistakes we did!

As always, we would like to hear what you think about our work.

In community,



Isles' Board held its annual retreat in early May. Pictured here back row, left to right: Jim Golden, Elizabeth Johnson (Isles' COO). Eldar Shafir, Jeff Stoller, Manish Shah, Bill Brooks, Marty Johnson, (Isles' CEO). Front row, left to right: Linda Revelle, Phyllis Holly, Nancy Svarcbergs (Board Chair), Brian Trelstad, Bob Harris.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

It's Everyone's Job

"Report unusual odors," "Do not spray pesticides," "Keep air vents clean." These may sound like simple housekeeping instructions, and they are—this time for our children's schools.

Isles is the leader of the Trenton Coalition for Healthy Schools that created the healthy schools campaign, "It's Everyone's Job!" last spring. It includes use of three TOP TEN lists to help promote healthy schools—one for teachers and students in the classroom, one for maintenance staff, and one for school principals. The items on each list are simple guidelines on how to ensure a healthy indoor school environment, a subject that is of increasing interest to the public as new information is gained about how indoor environmental conditions can affect health.

According to Elyse Pivnick, VP, Environment and Community Health, "These lists are meant to make students, staff, facility managers, and administrators more aware of indoor environmental quality issues, and to recommend simple ways to help protect our school environment. But perhaps the most important part of the campaign is the message: 'It's Everyone's Job!' If students, teachers, staff, and administrators are not working together, a healthy school is a lot harder to achieve."

The campaign is gaining both state and



national recognition. Information about the campaign was part of an article in the *NJEA Reporter*, the monthly newspaper of the New Jersey Education Association; Joe Ponessa and Elyse Pivnick co-authored a paper that was delivered at the annual Priester Conference of Agricultural

Extension Services in Kentucky on April 4th. A description of the campaign was also included in a national press release describing healthy school initiatives throughout the country distributed as part of National Healthy Schools Day, April 19th.

With the support of the Trenton Board of Education, Isles began providing healthy schools training to the staff of Trenton schools in November. A sampling of things learned as recorded on evaluation surveys: "Avoid aerosol sprays," "Keep pests out by sealing food and plugging up entry holes," "Harsh chemicals can trigger breathing problems," "All are accountable for a healthy school!"

What are staff reporting they will now do? "Help our staff work together to have a healthy school!"

The Coalition is pleased to be working in partnership with the Pediatric/Adult Asthma Coalition of NJ with funding from the NJ Dept of Health and Senior Services. For more information about the program or to arrange training in your school, contact Elyse Pivnick, 341-4723.

TRENTON HEALTHY SCHOOLS COALITION

- ANNE-MARIE AMBERCROMBIE,
NJEA Environment Committee
- CLATIE CAMPBELL,
Private consultant
- MARGARET DOOLEY,
Trenton School District School Nurses
- JOSEPH PONESSA,
Rutgers Cook College
- PATRICIA NELSON-JOHNSON,
Trenton Childhood Asthma Project
- JANE NOGAKI,
New Jersey Environmental Federation
- CONSTANCE SLACK,
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School
- EILEEN SENN,
Private consultant
- ELYSE PIVNICK,
Isles/ Environment and Community Health



Bank of America presented a check for \$100,000 to Isles, Inc., in February at a press conference held in one of the homes being rehabilitated by Isles. The gift included a special \$50,000 Neighborhood Builder grant in recognition of Bank of America's commitment to supporting organizations devoted to rebuilding neighborhoods and communities in New Jersey. Trenton and Isles, Inc., were one of five cities and organizations chosen to receive a donation. Pictured above, holding the check, are Trenton's Mayor Douglas Palmer, Bank of America's Sr. VP Abby O'Neill, Isles' Board President Nancy Svarebergs, and Career Center Director Clete Davis.

INFORMATION IS POWER

For an organization like Isles, tracking lots of data really matters.

What is happening in our neighborhoods and region? What is our impact?

We need data in an understandable format for us and the community-at-large to use. An exciting technology called GIS (Geographic Information Systems) increasingly helps us do that.

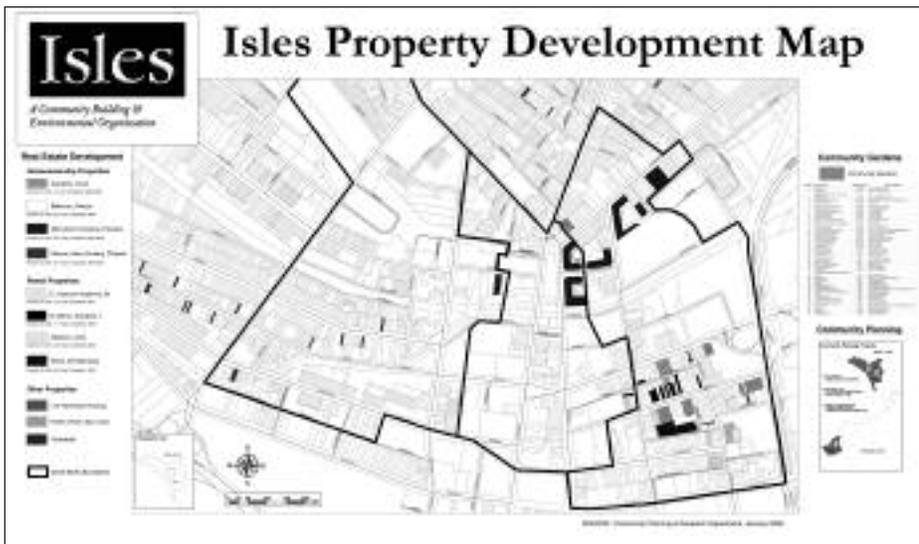
GIS is a computer-based database and mapping system. It takes data and maps it, showing the spatial relationships between different kinds of data. For example, we can map the environmental hazards in our communities and then map the locations of the related public health problems. We

can track changes in poverty rates over time by census block. (Yes, poverty is spreading outward from the urban core.) GIS has traditionally been used in map making, geology, and engineering; however, GIS is making its way into other fields like community development and regional planning. As a result, Isles is expanding its capacity to use GIS.

To make the maps accessible to the public, we are very excited about a new technology, IM (Internet Mapping). It will allow visitors to our website to view

and create their own maps, including aerial photos of their neighborhoods, census data for their communities, and other Isles community data. We plan to have the site up and running by July to help provide communities with the mapping information they need to understand and improve their surroundings.

Organizations, leaders, and other community stakeholders should make decisions as if information and impact matter. Maps can really help.



A group of first-time Bellevue Avenue homeowners recently participated in a focus group at Isles. The purpose of the session was to learn from them about their experiences as new homeowners and about ways Isles could improve and expand upon its homebuyer education program.

How are we doing?

Measuring Success at Isles

How do we know Isles is doing a good job as a community developer? We know that homes and gardens are built, students and adults are trained, hazards are cleaned up, renters become homeowners, and poor families create wealth through super-charged savings accounts. What should it cost for this good work to be done? As important, what would the cost be if the work wasn't done? (Think about families in poverty, vacant homes, homelessness, public health costs, increased prison populations, etc.)

These questions are tough for most nonprofit organizations. At Isles, we've been working to better understand the cost-benefit of our work. We also have engaged nationally in developing a system to better measure program outcomes across the country through the national Success Measures Project (SMP), started

over nine years ago by Marty Johnson and other leaders of the Development Leadership Network.

To further Isles' work, Paul Clements, Associate Professor and director of the MDA program at Western Michigan University, will spend several weeks with Isles this summer. He will work with staff, board, and program participants to refine our measures of success and the research plans for Isles over the next three years. Marty and Paul first met in 1996, when Paul was a Ph.D. candidate at the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University. Paul had years of experience in managing international development projects as well as researching their effectiveness. Paul helped design the Success Measures Project, a long-term effort to create indicators for development organizations. This work resulted in the publication of the *Success Measures Guide Book*. Marty Johnson was

the founding Director of the SMP Project and later the chair of the Success Measures Project Committee.

The SMP has recently been adopted by the national Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation (NRC) to refine and field test success indicators from across the country. Isles will participate in the NRC pilot. Alex Allen, VP, Community Planning and Research, and Susan Valentine, Sr. VP, will receive training with other agencies at the outset of the six-month pilot, beginning in June.

Isles ON THE ROAD

Andre Thomas, Career Center Operations Manager, attended the spring YouthBuild USA Conference in California and participated in the Transformation Institute program.

Career Center staff, trainees, and AmeriCorps members traveled to Washington, DC, to visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Smithsonian Institute, the National Air and Space Museum, the National Museum of African Art, and the Museum of Natural History. They also attended Kean University's Exceptional Opportunities Program conference where Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, professor in the African Studies department at the University of Pennsylvania, was keynote speaker.

Career Center trainees and Transitional Living Center residents attended a performance at McCarter Theatre in Princeton of the a cappella singing group "Sweet Honey in the Rock."

Isles' Transitional Living Center staff and residents visited the Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton and a drumming and dance extravaganza in Philadelphia featuring *Matthew Simon, Career Center Program Assistant*.

Elizabeth Johnson, COO, gave a presentation about building coalitions at the People, Power, and Public Green Spaces:

Building Advocacy Movement regional conference in Philadelphia in February.

Marty Johnson, CEO, led a class at the Princeton Environmental Institute of Princeton University. He also taught a housing workshop at Princeton in partnership with the Student Volunteers Council. Marty attended a national convening of community change leaders at the Ford Foundation in New York in March and traveled to Akron, Ohio, to accept the Outstanding Alumni Award from his alma mater, St. Vincent-St. Mary High School.

Juanita Joyner, VP, Special Projects, gave a presentation about volunteerism to a public speaking class in January at Mercer County Community College.

Katherine Lee, Isles Fellow, gave a presentation on Healthy Homes to a parent group at Monument School's Second-Cup-of-Coffee series. She also hosted an informational table at a Princeton University conference on the international food trade and its impact on development in the environment. Katherine also attended Rutgers' New Jersey Conference on Childhood Obesity: Challenges and Solutions in April, along with *Elyse Pivnick, VP, Environment and Community Health*.

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey (NOFA-NJ) and Isles co-sponsored an organic gardening school in April attended by over 200 people. *Elyse Pivnick, VP, Environment and Community Health*, led a workshop on

community gardening. Elyse attended the Alliance of Healthy Homes National Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, in February, and gave a presentation on Healthy Schools at the Robbins School in December.

LeKisha Powell-Brooks, Community Gardening Specialist, completed Rutgers University's Cooperative Extension Master Gardening program.

Megan Ruf, Environment and Community Health Manager, provided Healthy Homes training for participants in Mercer County's Welfare to Work program.

Susan Valentine, Sr. Vice President, presented "How to Stage a Successful Media/Press Event" at a Women in Development/Mercer County roundtable held at Princeton Public Library in May. She also conducted program evaluation and focus group meetings with new homeowners, homeowner association members, and participants in financial literacy classes.

Catharine Vaucher, VP, Resource Development, presented "How to Turn Volunteers into Donors and Solicitors" at a roundtable for seasoned fundraising professionals of Women in Development/Mercer County held at McCarter Theatre in February.

THEATER REVIEW

Several YouthBuild trainees and transitional living center residents attended a performance of the singing group "Sweet Honey in The Rock" at McCarter Theatre. One attendee, Demon Hicks, offered these observations about the experience:

"I had never been to the theater. I thought the most interesting thing (about the theater) was how the seats were set up and the way you could feel everything more than at the movies. My favorite part about the experience was when the group had the audience participate, the call and response part. It was funny to see everybody all into it, even people who couldn't even sing. I remember two songs in particular: 'Wade in the Water,' because of the harmony, and Bob Marley's 'Redemption,' because of the energy of the singer and her dancing."



Isles offers Career Center trainees varied cultural experiences. If you are interested in sponsoring tickets for trainees (or if you have season tickets to donate), please think of us. Contact Catharine Vaucher, VP for Resource Development, at 341-4743.



Demon Hicks, YouthBuild trainee and theater critic.



Maureen Daniels, Resource Development Manager, and Catharine Vaucher, VP, Resource Development, attended Share Our Strength's Taste of Princeton fundraiser. Isles received a portion of the proceeds from the benefit.

Tykira Robbins & Isles

There is a photo in the Isles reception area of a sweet, round-faced little girl digging in a garden—it is Tykira Robbins, at the time a 7-year-old elementary school student, working with Isles on a school garden. Today, Tykira is an 18-year-old YouthBuild trainee. Tykira remembers fondly "digging in the dirt and planting flowers."

Tykira was born in Trenton in 1987. After she stopped attending Trenton High School, she heard from her brother about Isles' YouthBuild program. He was a recent graduate.

Tykira came to the Career Center in February 2003 as a 10th grader and will earn her high school diploma in June. She is also learning construction and has been part of a YouthBuild crew rehabbing several homes on Academy Street, around the corner from Isles' main office. In addition, she works at one of Trenton's Recreation Department sites, where she tutors and mentors elementary and middle-school children after school.

Tykira credits YouthBuild with keeping her "out of trouble" and says that at Trenton High School her friends were not a good influence on her. From Monday through Friday, Tykira goes directly from



Tykira in 1994 participating in an Isles' elementary school garden project.

When asked what her friends would say about her, Tykira said they would comment that she is a good basketball player and has a good sense of humor. When asked what the children she works with at the Recreation Center would say about her, she said they probably like her because she's not too tough on them and because "I'm the same size as them." Tykira, who is diminutive, is known as "little one" at the Career Center—tiny, but mighty!



Tykira (on the right) in 2004, participating in a gardening project with other Career Center trainees and Isles' COO Liz Johnson.

her academic program at the Career Center to her 3-9 p.m. job. She also works on Saturdays from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Tykira says staying busy is key to her success.

Tykira will take courses at Mercer County Community College after she graduates. Her short-term goal is to take health and child care courses, earn a two-year degree and then a four-year college degree. Her longer-term goal is to be a psychologist. She credits the Career Center and YouthBuild with exposing her to different career options.

NEW STAFF

Maureen Daniels, Manager, Resource Development, was 2004 chair of the YWCA Princeton's Tribute to Women awards dinner. She managed her own custom framing design business while working at ETS as a program coordinator. Maureen has a BA in English/Journalism with minors in French and Spanish from Rutgers University.

Angela Francis, Grant Writer, joins Isles from Massachusetts, where she was working with the public interest group MASSPIRG. As an organizer in New England, she trained college students in both leadership and campaign skills. Angela earned her BA degree in Advertising and Women's Studies at Pennsylvania State University.

LeKisha Powell-Brooks, Community Gardening and Outreach Specialist, began working with Isles last spring as a work-study student from Mercer County Community College, then joined the gardening program as an assistant. This past fall and winter, Kisha led the Healthy Homes assessment process, helping Isles complete the testing of 225 homes for lead, pest infestation, and moisture. This spring, Kisha completed her Master Gardener training with the Mercer County Agricultural Extension Service.



Students from the Rutgers Bloustein School Graduate Seminar, taught by Professors Norman Glickman and Kathe Newman, presented a Community Food Assessment at Isles' Career Center on May 3rd. The students presented results of their research on hunger and access to healthy foods in Trenton.



10 Wood Street
 Trenton, NJ 08618
 609.341.4700
 www.isles.org



Spring Newsletter 2005

Happy New Homeowner



New Monument Crossing homeowner selects tiles for flooring.

Youngsters Learn to Make Maple Syrup



Children all bundled up for a day of maple sugaring, one of Isles' environmental education programs.

Isles Leadership

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 Andie Styner