



The Environmental Justice Report

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Department of
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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT – MEDIA ALLIANCE: FROM FOOD DESERT TO FOOD FOREST PROGRAM

The prevalence of food deserts, places where residents' access to fresh, affordable and nutritious food is inadequate or non-existent, is a critical issue affecting our nation. These food deserts are typically found in low income communities, and are disproportionately located in urban, minority neighborhoods, and Environmental Justice areas. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 650,000 New Yorkers have limited access to healthy and nutritious foods. Socioeconomic and geographic limitations on food options contribute to serious health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and other diet-related conditions.

In the City of Troy, a neighborhood organization is providing an oasis to combat these food wastelands. Media

Alliance, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1977, has become an important resource in the community using a wide variety of programming, including community gardening and education. Located in the north central Troy neighborhood, Media Alliance is best known for operating a community art center called The Sanctuary for Independent Media. In 2013, DEC awarded the organization an Environmental Justice Community Impact Grant of more than \$49,000 to serve as a fiscal sponsor for the North Troy Environmental Education Consortium on the "From Food Desert to Edible Neighborhood" project.

This grant made it possible for Media Alliance to transform multiple formerly vacant lots in north central Troy into



Growing food for the community helps bring diverse people together for a great cause.

green, food-producing, productive spaces. The grant served as a catalyst for change in the neighborhood and the organization was able to expand, acquiring chickens, beehives, and two greenhouses. In addition to producing fresh and healthy foods, green spaces have brought neighborhood interest to their projects. In Troy, a historically industrial city, environmental justice is intertwined with economic and social justice. In north central Troy, centuries of industrial practices have negatively affected soil and water quality. Media Alliance continues to engage and educate the public on these important issues, as well as pollution and environmental degradation, soil and water bioremediation techniques, and Hudson River habitat ecology.



Media Alliance uses art and participatory action to promote social and environmental justice and freedom of creative expression. Community building and collaboration are paramount in their efforts to transform the challenged neighborhood into a productive and joyful place.

Media Alliance works toward a more environmentally just society through a number of projects, including: NATURE Lab (North Troy Art, Technology and Urban Research in Ecology), Collard City Growers (community gardens and food forest), Kitchen Sanctuary (our healthy food project), WOOC 105.3FM (our community radio station), Youth Media Sanctuary (our media arts education program) and Freedom Square (our outdoor art and performance venue).

For more information on Media Alliance, visit their website at: <http://www.mediasanctuary.org/>.

APPLY NOW FOR COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANTS

The Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) is now accepting applications for the 2016-2017 Environmental Justice Community Impact Grants. Celebrating 10 years of offering grants to not-for-profit organizations to address environmental harms in low-income and minority communities, OEJ will be distributing more than \$3 million to communities across the state, the most ever offered in a single grant round!

Organizations can request up to \$50,000. Projects must address a community's exposure to multiple harms and risks and include a research component that will be used to expand the knowledge of the affected community. Previous projects awarded by DEC have included citizen science, water/air quality monitoring, urban farming, alternative energy projects, curriculum development for schools, green infrastructure installation and more. For a complete list of previous projects and winners, visit: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/31403.html>.

All applicants are required to register and prequalify in the Grants Gateway before applying for a Community Impact Grant. This is a web-based grants management tool used to improve the way grants are administered by the state. Once registered and prequalified, organizations can then apply for the grant in the Grants Gateway. For instructions and application, visit: grantsgateway.ny.gov.

The deadline to submit applications is Tuesday, January 31. For more information on the Community Impact Grants, send an e-mail to justice@dec.ny.gov or call Kassandra Perez-Desir, grants coordinator, at 718.482.6404.





CITIZEN SCIENCE SURVEY

Ordinary residents can conduct extraordinary environmental research right in their own community. Citizen science, or scientific work undertaken by members of the general public, is often used to sample water, air or soil to determine whether harmful toxics exist. Citizen scientists volunteer their time and often work under the direction of professional scientists and institutions. This type of public participation in scientific research can play a major role in educating other residents about what possible harms may exist in their backyards and creating healthier neighborhoods throughout the state.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Office of Environmental Justice would like to gauge your interest in the need for citizen science projects in your community. As we consider allocating resources to environmental justice neighborhoods, your input is very important. We recognize that every community is unique. One area may be near a waterbody with concerns about water quality. Another community may be located near several factories and have concerns about air quality. Whatever the concern is, we want to hear from you!

If you have concerns about the environment where you live, please send an e-mail to: justice@dec.ny.gov and include the following information:

City, town or borough you live in and specific neighborhood (example: Buffalo – Masten District – along Humboldt Parkway)

- Concern (example: air quality of nearby residential area)
- Potential source (example: Kensington Expressway)
- Contact information (only if you want to be contacted further about participating in a possible project in your area)

You can make a difference in your community!

AARON MAIR: CONNECTING LOVE OF THE OUTDOORS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Some people enjoy the outdoors. Some are passionate about protecting it. Aaron Mair does both.

After nearly three decades of fighting for protection of the environment and public health in New York, Mair is now a dynamic presence in the national and international environmental community. In 2015, he was elected the first black president of the Sierra Club, the nation's largest grassroots environmental organization, with more than 2,000,000 members and supporters.

Those who know Mair are well-acquainted with his passion to take on big challenges and tear down barriers.



Dispelling the myth that people of color aren't interested in environmental conservation or outdoor recreation is just the latest hill he has chosen to climb, and one he plans to conquer.

Because of his connection to nature at an early age, Mair developed a knack for recognizing environmental injustice and protecting outdoor resources. He is credited as the catalyst for Albany's environmental justice movement in the 1980s, when he mobilized residents in the predominately black Arbor Hill community to successfully shut down a garbage incinerator after a decade-long battle.

"I observed fog and black soot covering cars in my neighborhood, so I went to the source of the fog once I located it," recalled Mair. "I didn't know what the place was when I literally went up and knocked on the door, but I learned it was a garbage incinerator."

"I was moved to action after my daughters started getting ill. Many children in the community suffered from lead poisoning, and I noticed that people were having respiratory issues, so I began to map where they were getting sick. Emily Grissom, who we called 'the mother of Sheridan Hollow neighborhood,' supported my data collection efforts, which was the beginning of the EJ movement in Albany."

At the time, Mair was frustrated that environmental groups were not involved in the community's efforts to close down the incinerator. However, his trust was renewed by the support of Sierra Club local volunteer Roger Gray, who gave the first monetary contribution toward the community's endeavors. This renewed Mair's trust in the Sierra Club and inspired him to get involved in the national organization.

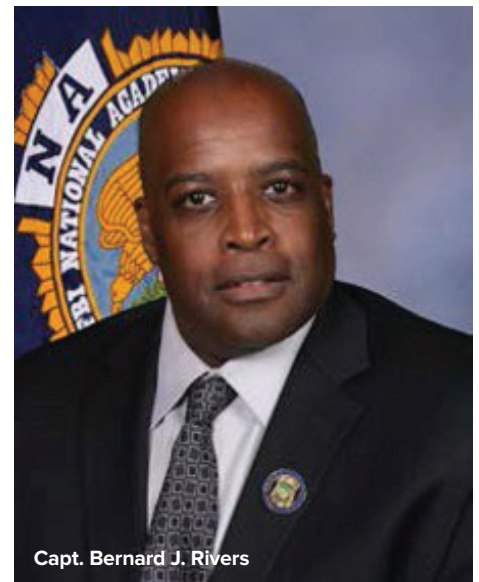
Mair became a Sierra Club member in 1999, and went on to hold more than three dozen leadership positions within the Hudson Mohawk Group and Atlantic Chapter. He has always strived to promote greater diversity from within. His vision is to connect all Americans, regardless of race or background, to our natural resources, which he views as "national treasures." His plans for the future of the Sierra Club are to conquer the pressing challenges of climate change, the obesity epidemic and high asthma rates.

When he's not busy answering calls to assist people facing environmental threats or attending global conferences on climate change, he is doing what he loves best -- enjoying a walk at one of his favorite places -- the Oswegatchie River in St. Lawrence County. To him, nature walks restore the soul.

"I hear sounds that enter my soul that have nothing to do with industrial activity. For some, going to church is soul-restoring. For me, it's being in nature. And I especially love being in this space with family and friends."

ECO CAPTAIN BERNARD J. RIVERS

Captain Bernard J. Rivers, the chief environmental conservation officer who oversees the Office of Professional Standards for DEC's Division of Law Enforcement (DLE), graduated from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) National Academy earlier this year. Internationally known for its academic excellence, the National Academy Program in Quantico, Virginia, offers ten weeks of advanced communication, leadership and fitness training for select professionals who have proven records within their agencies.



Capt. Bernard J. Rivers

The average academy attendee has 19 years of law enforcement experience. However, Captain Rivers has more than 35 years of law enforcement experience, having spent the last 24 years in DLE. He has held the following positions: Uniform Officer, Regions 1 and 2; Investigator, Region 1; Uniform Lieutenant, Regions 2 and 3; and Uniform Captain, Region 3.

The 265th Session of the National Academy saw 230 law enforcement officers graduate. They included men and women from 47 states and from 24 countries, three military organizations, four federal civilian organizations, and two state environmental law enforcement units—New York State and the State of Indiana. FBI Director James Comey was the principal speaker at the ceremony.

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