

TreeKeepers Update

By Andrew Emma

It was a real honor to be asked by Sarah Wu at [Greenworks](#) to prepare a short presentation about the [TreeKeepers](#) program at their [Urban Sustainability Forum](#) night at the Academy of Natural Sciences a few weeks ago. At one of those forums many years ago, I befriended Erica Smith Fichman, who of course is now our TreePhilly Campaign Manager. So good things happen at these events!

At the event, I explained the basics of our TreeKeepers program: how we have two seasonal crews, working 6 months at a time, that are tasked with maintaining the green spaces and green elements of our city parks and rec centers. The crew positions are filled through word-of-mouth from PPR employees, and also garnered from PHS's [Roots 2 Re-entry](#) program, which trains ex-offenders in horticulture and arboriculture, and then helps place them into jobs. Our crews use only hand tools such as pole saws, hand saws, loppers, machetes, rakes, and shovels to elevate trees, remove invasive species, and thin out unruly branches from trees that in many cases haven't been maintained in decades. They interact with volunteer groups, neighborhood groups, nonprofits, and the public on a daily basis, representing our department in the best way possible, as an active, enthusiastic group of workers who take pride in what they do and push themselves every day.

This year, a new element was added to the TreeKeepers cache of knowledge, when additional positions were created specifically to aid in the maintenance of our city's ever-increasing number of green stormwater infrastructure sites. With training from PHS, our crews learned over 6 weeks how to identify and maintain inlets, outlets, and problems within stormwater basins, bioswales, and tree trenches. Increasing their base of expertise will allow our crew members even greater flexibility when seeking out full-time employment in the future, either within our department or at an outside agency. The sites that we visit stretch the entire length of the city, from rec centers in the Northeast, to Natural Lands in West Philly, so our crews also become more familiar with their surroundings and again, expand their opportunities for future work possibilities.

At the Greenworks event, we showed before and after pictures of some of our previous years' work, as well as maps we've made that show areas where new trees could be planted. Afterwards numerous people came up to me with questions and praise, and being able to take that positivity back to the crew the next day was a wonderful thing. All in all, this opportunity provided us with another opportunity to highlight our TreeKeepers program to a new audience, and hopefully we can continue to live up to the high expectations set both by ourselves and the city in general. In the meantime, "like" [Tree Keepers on Facebook](#) and follow along with our travels week to week!