



Stearns' 2011 Freeman Tilden Award Honors *Good Neighbors*, Collaboration, and Innovation



Left: NPS Education Specialist Liza Stearns checks in with a group of "student-designers" from Brookline's Heath School as they prepare for a "public meeting" where they will share how their park design satisfies client needs and helps strengthen the community. Below: A third grader from the William Henderson Inclusion School in Dorchester adds finishing touches to a model created to communicate her team's park design ideas. Both photos by Joel Veak. Courtesy of National Park Service, Olmsted National Historic Site.

On Thursday, November 10 in Saint Paul, Minnesota, National Park Service (NPS) Director Jonathan Jarvis presented Olmsted NHS Education Specialist Liza Stearns with the prestigious Freeman Tilden Award for outstanding contributions by a NPS employee to educating the public. Citing Stearns' work of envisioning and developing *Good Neighbors: Landscape Design & Community Building*, a new, innovative curriculum-based education program

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for third graders, Director Jarvis noted that *Good Neighbors* “brings the story and work of Frederick Law Olmsted to life for children and, through hands-on experiences, [gives] children ... practical experience in landscape design and [the chance to] discover the important role of parks in society.”

The award was created in 1982 to stimulate and reward creative work by National Park Service employees resulting in positive impacts on the visiting public. It is named for legendary National Park Service figure and Massachusetts native Freeman Tilden, who authored *Interpreting Our Heritage* in 1957. Tilden's book spelled out six universal principles of interpretation and has influenced generations of





Top left: During a class visit to Pressley Associates, Inc., students from the Baker School in Brookline learn about some of the tools landscape architects use to communicate their design ideas. Top right: During a planning session hosted by Stantec, Inc., landscape architects, park managers and teachers deliberate strategies for connecting urban third graders with the landscape architects that shape the communities in which they live. Below: Student Conservation Association intern Adrienne Sharigian works with a young designer to integrate diverse plant species into the design team's urban park woodland. Photos by Joel Veak. Courtesy of National Park Service, Olmsted NHS.

park, environmental, and museum interpreters and educators nationally.

Good Neighbors currently targets public schools in Brookline and Boston that are near the Olmsted-designed Emerald Necklace park system and also both, to varying degrees, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. It has been officially adopted by the Public Schools of Brookline as part of the core third-grade curriculum.

Through pre-visit classroom activities and a site visit that includes experiencing the landscape and collaboratively designing a three-dimensional park model, students learn about Frederick Law Olmsted, how landscape architecture affects their lives today, and how thoughtfully-designed parks can strengthen communities. Post-visit activities offer opportunities to visit a contemporary landscape architecture firm or explore a portion of the Emerald Necklace. The students gain exposure to the working profession of landscape

architecture and can learn how to be active citizen-stewards of public parks in their own community. With these components in mind, NPS Director Jarvis called *Good Neighbors* “a great example of place-based learning opportunities available in national parks.”

The Development and Presentation of *Good Neighbors* Reflects Rich Collaboration

According to Stearns, *Good Neighbors* is a model of collaboration, both within the Park Service and in partnership with outside individuals and organizations. She is quick to credit the NPS colleagues, interns, school officials, landscape architects, and partner organizations who participated in envisioning, developing, publicizing, and piloting the program. “The strength and real-world appeal of the *Good Neighbors* learning experience is a testimony to the power of collaboration and an example what can happen when people with diverse expertise, talents and resources join



forces to accomplish a shared goal. Not only is the goal achieved, but all the players walk away with so much more than they ever anticipated.”

Boston landscape architect Joe Geller of Stantec, Inc. was involved in developing and piloting *Good Neighbors*. He reports that “[o]ur experience with Liza Stearns and the *Good Neighbors* program has been a very powerful and meaningful experience for all of our staff who participated. We have all appreciated the opportunity to interact and influence third graders and assist in educating them about the work we do and its relationship to Olmsted and his legacy in our community.”

Good Neighbors Represents Educational Innovation

Good Neighbors is innovative in several respects. Using an integrated approach tied to the theme of Parks for People, the curriculum supports grade three learning

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Top left: During an exploration of the Fairsted landscape, students from the Patrick Lyndon School in Boston discover how the selection and arrangement of plant materials affect the character of place. Top right: A young designer captivates his peers with his passionate description of how thoughtfully-designed parks help strengthen the community. Below: Park model-making kits include scaled topographic bases, diverse species of model trees and shrubs, path and stream segments, and custom site furnishings. Photos by Joel Veak. Courtesy of National Park Service, Olmsted NHS.

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Fairsted ... [and] come to see themselves as stewards of their communities and their surroundings.”

model for use in their parks. ... NAOP looks forward to promoting *Good Neighbors* and facilitating partnerships to grow its success nationwide.”

standards across the disciplines, including, language arts, math, science, art, physical education, and social studies. It is also perhaps the first NPS program modeled on the “whole child” approach to teaching and learning, an approach that engages educators, policymakers, business leaders, families, and community members in working together to create real-world learning opportunities that develop and prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow.

Third-grade teacher Gretchen Albertini of Brookline’s Devotion School describes *Good Neighbors* as “powerful, unique, and engaging,” and its activities as “meaningful, relevant, and developmentally appropriate.” Having participated in the program with her students, she observes that “*Good Neighbors* ... inspires and empowers children as it fosters connections between history and current day landscape architecture. ... [T]he children learn about Olmsted and

The results for students in some cases have been nothing short of transformative. “Discovering that they can play a role supporting and shaping the parks that are so much a part of community life and health is an empowering revelation for many of the children,” emphasizes Stearns.

Good Neighbors Is a Replicable Model for Park-Based Programs Elsewhere

The National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP) hopes to pilot *Good Neighbors* with local park friends groups caring for Olmsted-connected parks and park systems around the country. The program is seen as a replicable model for exposing children to Frederick Law Olmsted, parks, park design, park stewardship, and the profession of landscape architecture. Iris Gestram, Executive Director of the National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP), reports that “there is great interest from NAOP partner organizations in cities around the country to adapt the *Good Neighbors*

More Background on *Good Neighbors*

For further information on *Good Neighbors: Landscape Design & Community Building*, please visit the *Good Neighbors* section of Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site’s web page at <http://www.nps.gov/frla/forteachers/goodneighbors.htm>. To view a ten-minute video of the program visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgIkDpx1Y>.



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