

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Arbor Day Foundation honors TheDCH with national innovation award

Return to Work Green Jobs trains Delaware ex-offenders for jobs in a growing industry

The Delaware Center for Horticulture is pleased to announce that the Arbor Day Foundation has named TheDCH [Return to Work Green Jobs](#) program as the recipient of its national 2014 Award for Education Innovation. The honor recognizes inventive programming that successfully introduces and teaches its audience the importance of trees and inspires future environmental stewards.



“TheDCH is proud of our Green Jobs program and the men and women who have chosen to improve their communities, the environment, and their own lives by becoming a part of the green jobs industry,” said TheDCH Executive Director Pamela Sapko. “We are also grateful for the Arbor Day Foundation’s recognition. National exposure helps advance TheDCH’s efforts to change lives, build communities, and improve the environment through horticulture.”

([Photo Album](#): Green Jobs Crews 2009-2013)

Return to Work Green Jobs is a 10-12 week program that delivers hands-on work experience and training curriculum that together aim to equip ex-offenders to secure meaningful employment and reintegrate into the community. It includes a half day each week of job readiness skills training and practical horticulture classroom time in botany, planting techniques, and sustainable horticulture, as well as 4.5 days a week of hands-on work experience supervised by experts in urban forestry, urban agriculture and public landscapes. Graduates leave with skills, certifications, the satisfaction of improving the communities they come from, and essential employer references. The curriculum is endorsed by the Delaware Nursery and Landscape Association as an Introductory Horticulture Training Program.

Since its inception, 39 men and women have successfully completed TheDCH Green Jobs training (seven alternates also finished the classroom portion), and an encouraging two-thirds of the graduates went on to secure employment.

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Employment is a key factor in reducing recidivism. According to statistics compiled by the U.S. Courts, only seven percent of ex-offenders who were employed throughout their supervised release landed back in prison within five years – compared to a sobering two-thirds of all ex-offenders, according to a recent H.O.P.E. commission report.

The public benefit to job training is clear: it costs taxpayers \$33,000 to house each inmate each year, according to a VERA Institute for Justice report, compared to \$5,000 per participant for the 400-hour Green Job training for a job sector that is expected to grow 13 percent in the next two decades.

TheDCH staff works closely with the Delaware Department of Correction to identify men and women who are highly motivated to re-integrate into the community and acquire new skills that will help them set a satisfying, productive course in life. Other key partners have included the Delaware Department of Labor and Wilmington’s U.S. Probation office.

TheDCH Return to Work Green Jobs pilot program launched with funding from the Delaware Solid Waste Authority (in lieu of penalty funds), the City of Wilmington, and several state legislators, then continued through U.S. Forest Service American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds. Today, funding continues through the generosity of private funders, the Laffey-McHugh Foundation, Burpee Foundation, and Community Reinvestment Act bank grants. TheDCH is actively seeking additional funders to expand the Green Jobs program to include other populations that face employment challenges, like those who have been chronically under-employed and young adults recently emancipated from foster care.

“With adequate funding, we’d like to become a model return to work program, providing a robust 450-hour hands-on learning experience for twelve participants each year that includes expanded certifications in First Aid/CPR, OSHA safety, pesticide application, and entry-level horticulture, as well as connections to a GED if needed. We will also dedicate classroom time toward other industry certifications requiring further training. These certifications will better equip participants to enter the field of horticulture and maintain employment upon successful completion” said TheDCH Director of Programs Jen Bruhler. In addition, TheDCH is excited to offer training in the emerging field of sustainable horticulture; TheDCH facilitates sustainable horticulture projects throughout Delaware and believe it’s critical to provide horticulture training opportunities that incorporate an environmental ethic.”

The next Green Jobs crew of two women and an alternate begins this month. TheDCH will be presented with the award at the Arbor Day Awards Ceremony on April 25 - 27 in Nebraska City, Nebraska.

*The **Delaware Center for Horticulture** cultivates greener communities by inspiring appreciation and improvement of the environment through horticulture, education and conservation. Founded in 1977, TheDCH supports numerous community gardens and school gardens; organizes park improvement projects, beautifies Delaware’s roadsides with native vegetation; maintains the landscaping of many urban streetscapes; leads regional community forestry projects; and provides educational programs for children, teens, and adults. For more information, visit thedch.org.*

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