Cultivate

SPRING AND SUMMER 2026

dch
Delaware Center for
HORTICULTURE

DCH LAUNCHES FIRST CLASS OF YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS

100 NEW TREES HONOR VETERANS IN MEMORIAL PARK

VOLUNTEERS SHOW UP FOR OUR FARM, TREE PLANTINGS AND GROUNDS

Rooted *in* Service

A message from our Executive Director, Joanne McGeoch

"Everybody can be great because anybody can serve."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dear friends,

This issue of *Cultivate* highlights the many hands that have had a role in serving our community. From hundreds of volunteers that contributed to our greening efforts, to hundreds of children participating in a Youth Enrichment Program (YEP) planting trees and learning about how to care for our environment, service is rooted in the core of our work (Pictured below).

In April, we celebrated the graduation of the 17th class of Branches to Chances®. Our graduation ceremony was particularly meaningful this year, as we had two incredible speakers, Terrell Watson, Peer Mentor/Outreach Coordinator at the Wilmington Hope Commission, and U.S. Senator, Chris Coons. Terell shared his personal journey in recovery and incredible resiliency which led him to carve out a career dedicated to helping others find their way. Senator Coons shared his commitment to service and corps programs like these that open doors and opportunity through service learning. The success of our program is dependent not only on the training opportunities we provide, but the many partners, like The Wilmington Hope Commission, Limon House/Friendship House, our generous funders, and the public gardens and local businesses that open their doors for service learning.

In June, we continued to focus on scaling up and branching out with the launch of our Urban Conservation Corps (UCC), a summer workforce program serving young people ages 18-25. As the only accredited conservation corps program in Delaware through The (national) Corps Network – the Urban Conservation Corps program participants will be introduced to green jobs through horticulture, while developing employable skills in problem-solving, communication, conflict resolution, and time management. On the personal development side, UCC will promote social and emotional well-being and empower young people to be leaders as they contribute to service-led projects in our community.

Nationally, corps programs provide a strong return on investment. A study by economists at ICF found that every $1 invested in Corps returns $17 to society, government agencies, and program participants. So not only does the program impact the participants; it provides lasting investments in our community.

To learn how to be of service to others is perhaps one of the greatest lessons one can learn. We look forward to sharing the impact of our UCC in the weeks and months to come.

Best regards,

Joanne McGeoch
Executive Director
Delaware Center for Horticulture

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Welcome to the team!

Kesha Braunskill

Community Forestry Manager

Kesha focuses on Wilmington's greening efforts and fostering lasting partnerships. With experience at the U.S. Forest Service and the State of Delaware, she has engaged communities and municipalities, emphasizing the significance of trees. Kesha is an ISA certified arborist and holds a BS from the University of Maryland and an MS from Delaware State University. Kesha is excited to work with the communities in and around Wilmington to encourage a healthy urban forest.

Julia Ehrhardt

Ecological Landscapes Manager

Julia works with plants and people to create healthy communities that are beautiful, thriving, and regenerative. She has over twenty years of experience in horticulture, conservation, education, visitor services, and volunteer program management. She possesses a BSc in Agriculture, an MS in Public Gardens Administration via the Longwood Graduate Program, and an MPS in Sustainable Food Systems from the Culinary Institute of America. Her career has taken her to the New York Botanic Garden, Longwood Gardens, Mt. Cuba Center, and Tyler Arboretum.

Ana Pavon

Advancement Coordinator

Ana supports the planning and execution of fundraising and donor activities through events, membership, stewardship, and community engagement. With several years of experience supporting municipal and non-profit organizations, she brings a strong background in fundraising and membership work, focused on deepening community engagement, building meaningful relationships, and supporting grassroots giving. Ana holds a BA in Sustainability and Certification in Environmental Education from Arizona State University.

Launching a New Conservation Corps

Nina Groop, Grants Manager

DCH's first UCC cohort (left to right): Ruby Andreassen, DJ Johnson, Rashed Dickinson, and Eddie Carmine.

For more than fifteen years, the Delaware Center for Horticulture (DCH) has helped create something extraordinary through the Branches to Chances® (BTC) program. Adults who arrived uncertain—many navigating recovery, reentry, or long stretches of unemployment—left transformed. These changes are more than just deepening skills and pathways to employment but a connection to something larger than themselves. Participants become rooted in the truest sense of the word. That transformation—and the question of how to spark it earlier—is what led us to develop a similar program for a new cohort.

A Proven Model, a New Audience

This summer, we launched the Urban Conservation Corps (UCC), a new 12-week paid workforce program for young adults, ages 18 to 25, designed to connect the next generation to community greening work across Wilmington and New Castle County.

The Urban Conservation Corps is not a reinvention. It is an evolution. Branches to Chances® has served as DCH's proving ground for everything the UCC will build upon: training participants in hands-on horticultural skills, pairing technical learning with workplace development, and placing them inside real, meaningful projects that matter in their own communities.

What changes with the UCC is the audience and the moment. Where BTC meets adults navigating some of life's most difficult chapters, the UCC reaches young adults at an earlier, more formative stage. Many are stepping into the workforce for the first time. They are looking for direction, skills, and a sense of what they might be capable of. The UCC is designed to meet them there.

DCH brings this program to life not only from its own experience, but from its standing within a national movement. DCH has the only accredited conservation corps program in Delaware by The Corps Network (TCN)—the national body representing more than 140 conservation corps programs across the country. That network traces its roots to the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s, and it has spent decades refining what it means to engage young people in paid, structured service that addresses environmental needs while building careers. DCH's Urban Conservation Corps

is shaped by that legacy and informed by peers across the country who have built some of the most effective young adult workforce programs in the nation.

Earn, Serve and Learn

Each summer, our Urban Conservation Corps members will receive 12 weeks of paid, supervised fieldwork across DCH's three core program areas: urban agriculture, community forestry, and public landscapes. Participants won't spend weeks in a classroom before setting foot outside; learning and earning begins on day one, with service embedded in the work itself.

Under the guidance of experienced DCH staff, Corps members will plant and maintain trees, tend our urban farms and community garden spaces, and care for public landscape sites across Wilmington neighborhoods. They will learn tool safety, plant identification, soil and water management, and landscape installation, and all this will occur in the context of real projects with real stakes. As skills and confidence grow, so does responsibility.

The program is intentionally cohort-based. Crews work together, support one another, and share the experience of contributing to something visible and lasting in their communities. That cohort structure, familiar to anyone who has followed the conservation corps model, builds peer accountability and a sense of shared purpose that supervision alone cannot create.

The communities where Corps members will work are among the most environmentally burdened in Delaware. Wilmington neighborhoods with limited tree canopy, inadequate green space, and elevated rates of flooding and heat exposure are precisely where DCH focuses its greening efforts. The results of those efforts are measurable: trees planted and maintained, public landscapes improved, and urban farm sites made more productive. But the impact extends beyond the fruits of their labor. When young adults from a community participate in greening that community, something shifts in both the landscape and in how participants see themselves and their relationship to the places they call home.

A Growing Organization, A Stronger Community

The launch of the Urban Conservation Corps reflects a broader moment of growth for DCH. New leadership, a completed strategic plan, and a deepening commitment to mission-aligned earned revenue have set the organization on a path toward greater impact and resilience. The UCC is one expression of that direction—a program that serves young adults, strengthens community green spaces, and increases DCH's capacity to deliver the work that Wilmington and New Castle County need most, during the season when that work matters most.

Branches to Chances® changes lives by offering adults a second chance. The Urban Conservation Corps is built on the same belief: that meaningful work, supportive structure, and connection to the natural world can open doors that might otherwise stay closed. This summer, doors are open for a new generation, and their impact will last for years to come.

To support DCH's workforce programs, visit **THEDCH.ORG** to donate today

Refining Ecological Landscapes in Urban Spaces

This spring brought several improvement projects across DCH's landscapes and gardens. Our team focuses on enhancing both the beauty and functionality of these shared spaces, which serve not only as welcoming green areas for the community, but also as hands-on learning sites for participants in the Branches to Chances® program and graduates developing their skills on our Ecological Landscape team.

A major focus this season has been refining garden design through thoughtful combinations of native and companion planting in the twenty public spaces, containers and medians we install and maintain. Native species, particularly pollinators, strengthen local ecosystems, while complementary plantings add color, texture, and seasonal interest, welcome within the urban landscape.

These projects continue to serve as opportunities for learning and skill-building. Tasks such as pruning, transplanting, and weed management teach practical techniques essential in the field, while showcasing the unique challenges of urban landscapes, including compacted soil, pollution, and heavy foot traffic. Through this work, DCH continues building resilient, welcoming green spaces that support environmental health, workforce development, and community connection (pictured).

Community stewardship remains at the heart of the work. This spring, staff and community members came together for a cleanup of the Hattie Phelan Community Garden at 10th and Pine Streets—one of the oldest community gardens in Wilmington. The garden was originally created and cared for by the late Ms. Hazel Brown, a beloved resident, community activist, and shining light in the neighborhood.

What's coming up at DCH?

Create and Sip: Botanical Frame Workshop
Aug 7, 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm

Art Loop: "The Art of Nature"
Aug 7, 5:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Online Bulb Sale
Aug 5 - Aug 7, Members early bird access
Aug 8, Public presale begins

In-Person Bulb Sale
Oct 25

Houseplant Bingo
Aug 27, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

Check out our calendar

Or visit: www.theDCH.org/event-calendar

Commitment To Urban Agriculture

After 15 years, the Eric D. Robinson Urban Farm in Wilmington received a much-needed facelift. With the help of SunnyMac volunteers and Branches to Chances® participants, 15 aging wooden raised beds were removed and replaced with durable mossy green metal beds (pictured) that will support the farm for years to come. Our farms in Wilmington provide hands-on learning spaces for individuals, community members, and our own education program, Branches to Chances®, while connecting people with access to healthy food, flowers and herbs.

New Trees Take Root Across New Castle County

This spring, over 150+ trees took root as part of our efforts to increase urban tree canopy cover and revitalize public green spaces through our community forestry work. Funded in part by a multi-year grant from the US Forest Service and U.S. Senator Chris Coons, our tree planting projects this spring engaged community partners, volunteers, and our Branches to Chances® workforce trainees. In addition to increasing urban tree canopy, the funding has enabled the introduction of a diverse range of native species, carefully selected for both their environmental benefits and long-term impact. Among them are the delicate early-spring blooms of Flowering Redbuds and Serviceberries, as well as towering shade trees like Sycamores, Tulip Trees, and Swamp White Oaks—some of which are known to live for up to 300 years.

One of the planting sites selected was Veteran Memorial Park New Castle (Pictured, left). DCH staff worked with volunteers from the Delaware River & Bay Authority to plant trees that will enhance its entrance, creating a greener and more welcoming space for visitors for years to come.

DCH also planted trees at Rockwood Park, in Wilmington's West Side, and in Middletown in collaboration with the MOT Senior Center. At the MOT Senior Center (Pictured, above), Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority helped with the planting as part of their Earth Day celebration. These trees will enhance the visual appeal of the area and help soften and screen the view of nearby industrial infrastructure. Together, these efforts mark a significant step toward a healthier, more vibrant community landscape.

In June, we distributed 200+ free seedlings at World Environmental Day, to encourage residents in Wilmington and New Castle to plant their own trees and further our efforts to increase urban tree canopy.

Delaware Center for HORTICULTURE
1810 N. Dupont Street
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Reserve your place

at our Jardin *en* Vert, where glamour graces greenery. Enjoy sumptuous food and drink and a silent auction of sublimely curated goods and experiences, presented to the strains of live music.

More than a celebration, every bid helps grow our educational programs, workforce training initiatives, and community greening efforts—creating lasting beauty and impact throughout our region.

À bientôt dans le jardin.

Limited tickets—on sale now
For sponsorships, email bkelley@thedch.org