

Impact Maker

Communities Need Trees . . . We don't take them for granted.

By Sandi Schwartz

Many people take trees for granted. Yet, there are communities that do not have any trees lining their streets or yards. In fact, tree cover is correlated to the economics of a neighborhood. This is unfortunate since trees provide so many health and emotional benefits. According to a study in Australia, residents in urban areas have better overall health and a lower risk of developing stress if they have more trees within a walkable distance from their home. In neighborhoods with a tree canopy of thirty percent or more, adults have a thirty-one percent lower chance of developing psychological distress and a thirty-three percent lower chance of rating their general health as fair or poor. Without trees, communities miss out on these critical health benefits.

Greenspace brings critical health benefits to urban communities.

That is where Community Greening steps in. Co-founders Mark Cassini and Matt Shipley started Community Greening in 2016 to address a need they saw to bring more green space to urban areas and to people who traditionally have not had resources to green their neighborhood. This urban forestry non-profit based in Boca Raton has quickly expanded throughout the region. The group works with local residents and organizations to improve the environment and community by planting trees. They lead residential tree plantings and maintenance in low tree canopy and food desert neighborhoods in Delray Beach, Boynton Beach, and Boca Raton to help create sustainable greenspaces and a vibrant tree canopy.

Since its founding, the organization has planted over 10,000 trees in parks, schoolyards, residential yards, and urban orchards with the help of over 8,000 volunteers of all ages. They also now have eight full-time staff located between their offices at Lynn University's Social Impact Lab and their nursery in West Boca that contains about 5,000 trees.

In 2020, in the midst of the global pandemic, Community Greening won an Impact 100 grant in the Environment & Animal Welfare category for their Community Tree Champion program. The funds were used to hire, equip, and train a full-time Tree Champion who also leads youth tree teams and recruits volunteers and community partners. They were able to purchase a truck to help transport teen volunteers and trees to planting events. The grant also allowed Mark, Matt, and another staff member to visit leading urban forestry programs in the country, including Open Lands in Chicago, Trees Pittsburgh, and Trees Atlanta. They learned a tremendous amount of information from these visits and brought home tips and resources from these invaluable mentors.

The organization is so grateful for the help they received from Impact 100. "Winning the grant helped give us more credibility and it has led to more opportunities, such as new projects and funding sources," explained Mark. "Being able to tell other donors and supporters that we won an Impact 100 grant has opened so many doors for us." It also provided them with security and support during Covid, which was critical as they lost some corporate contracts during that challenging time.

They recently got a contract with the City of Delray Beach to plant 8,000 trees in the next four years. The city created a tree planting campaign, which highlights the importance of tree canopy. Community Greening is also involved in Boynton Beach's campaign to plant 45,000 trees by 2035. "We are working closely with city sustainability managers in Boca, Delray, and Boynton to help with tree plantings and tree giveaways." The US Fish and Wildlife Service is also funding the youth tree team that involves teens getting paid to work with Community Greening to maintain and plant trees.

In addition, Community Greening is involved in tree plantings at schools in the area. Schools typically have minimal tree canopy and shade, so adding trees helps to provide a more pleasant environment including cooler, shaded spots around campus. More trees also provide better stormwater management,

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cheaper energy bills, and better overall air quality. In fact, a recent Community Greening tree planting event at Atlantic High School in Delray was featured by WPBF News. "We really want to thank Impact 100 for helping us do what we do. It has been a great partnership. We really liked being involved with the group and hope to do it again with another grant soon," Mark said in gratitude.

COMMUNITY GREENING 2020 \$100,000 GRANT RECIPIENT

Fun fact about Mark and Matt: both their moms are members of Impact 100!

To learn more about Community Greening, volunteer with them, or participate in one of their fundraisers such as Swing for the Trees, please visit <https://communitygreening.org>.