

Creating Green Space through Urban and Social Innovation

Residents at the corner of Cecil Street and Kingsessing Avenue in the Kingsessing section of Philadelphia have something to smile about thanks to the combined efforts of faculty and students from Philadelphia University's Lab for Urban and Social Innovation (LUSI), the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge and Audubon Pennsylvania.

With funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the PhilaU group has been working over the past year with the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge and Audubon Pennsylvania to restore habitat/green space, as well as gathering space in the Kingsessing neighborhood of Philadelphia.

Rhyan Grech, the program manager for community stewardship at Audubon Pennsylvania, noted that a key element of the initiative relied upon engaging students from PhilaU's landscape architecture program to capture "the desires, advice, needs and dreams of the Kingsessing residents and translate them into design form."

By identifying opportunities with civic leaders in a series of neighborhood meetings and later refining those ideas in the studio, landscape architecture design students, Kathryn Miller '17 and Ryan Harris '17, along with their professor, Landscape Architecture Program Director Kimberlee Douglas, were able to develop eleven different drawings for presentation to the community.

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Kimberlee Douglas, Program Director, Landscape Architecture

Rhyan was impressed on how the students were able to "drill down into the specifics" regarding both the physical characteristics of the site and its relationship with neighbors.

"We had several well-attended community meetings," said Rhyan, "and I know those neighbors were coming out to see the students, and their models and drawings."

Kathryn and Ryan succeeded in designing a common space that fully reflected the many assets of the community while providing meaningful ecological value for native birds and pollinators. Now known as Southwest Community Garden, the parcel is a prized neighborhood treasure.

"The visual piece was so powerful in terms of fostering understanding of the project and garnering support," said Rhyan.

Refuge Manager Lamar Gore commended the contributions of Kimberlee Douglas and the PhilaU students whose efforts, "will ultimately result in a project that is jointly [en]visioned by partners and the community, which will bring gathering space, habitat, and programming to Kingsessing neighborhood."

While the students' efforts were applauded, PhilaU is grateful for the opportunity to partner with these outside groups. This collaborative approach for the Kingsessing project



// Kathryn Miller '17, Professor Kimberlee Douglas, and Ryan Harris '17 created models of their plans for the Kingsessing green space to share with community members.

advantage working with Philadelphia University on this project," said Rhyan.

For Kathryn and Ryan, the project was not only an engaging learning experience, but also a source of valuable knowledge and insights into their career goals.

"Seeing a resident who has lived on the block for years smile and get excited about a new public space in their community that they can call their own is a special feeling," said Ryan. "It really reminds you as a landscape architect student why we do what we do."

is a hallmark of LUSI, which unites communities, students, faculty and stakeholders in collective action through projects in the built environment. As Kimberlee observed, "The emphasis on collaboration truly empowers students to make a positive impact in our city and world as they participate in real-world projects."

The respect is mutual. "It's been a real