

Keeping Durham Beautiful



Children and volunteers with the East Durham Children's Initiative planted trees in East End Park on Arbor Day as part of an initiative to get the community more invested in the environment. (Staff photo by Elise Clouser)

By Elise Clouser
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When you imagine a beautiful environment, what comes to mind? You probably think of pristine, litter-free streams, an abundance of green trees and crisp, clear air. In Durham, volunteers interested in beautifying and protecting the environment work to make those images a reality for residents.

Keep Durham Beautiful, Inc. is a nonprofit, volunteer-based organization that aims to bring the Durham community together to beautify and conserve the environment. According to its website, the organization partners with the Durham City General Services Department and the Durham County to organize cleanup events, beautification projects and educational opportunities.

Tania Dautlick, executive director of Keep Durham Beautiful, said the organization works closely with neighborhood groups to organize local beautification projects. She said volunteers work with community members to understand environmental needs within neighborhoods in East Durham.

"People who live directly in the community know their needs best," Dautlick said. "Blending outside volunteer groups and community groups is also great because people are exposed to new perspectives, and sometimes friendships are even born."

Past Keep Durham Beautiful efforts in East Durham have included establishing tree orchards at Eastway Elementary School and planting new trees in East End Park and along Guthrie Avenue. Volunteer groups organize litter cleanups and other educational activities for families and community members. The East Durham Children's Initiative also planted 15 trees in East End Park in celebration of Arbor Day.

"Hands-on events are so educational for the kids," said Monica Ospina, an AmeriCorps volunteer who worked with the East Durham Children's Initiative to plant trees for Arbor Day. "It instills an appreciation for the environment and teaches them how to be a steward for the environment."

Dautlick said Keep Durham Beautiful recently received an \$80,000 grant from Duke Energy, which is the largest grant the organization has received to date. The money will go toward the East Durham

Urban Canopy Renewal project. The project aims to plant more than 100 trees in urban areas of East Durham that lack trees.

"There is a major focus on Guthrie Avenue because lots of the trees there were incompatible and dying," Dautlick said. "The project will help us reach our goals of environmental sustainability and beautification."

The grant will also go toward educational activities for the East Durham community, Dautlick said. She said another significant part of Keep Durham Beautiful's mission is to bring communities together, and money from the grant will allow for more community-centered educational opportunities.

"We want to reduce our carbon footprint while bringing the community together," Dautlick said.

"A community that comes together for the sake of the environment ends up caring more about the environment. When people care about the beauty of where they live, they work towards the common goal of protecting natural resources and preserving the natural beauty of the environment."