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**4. MARIANNE E. PALEY:** Head of Groundworks Lawrence near the spot where she is working to turn three acres of former industrial land into another park.

## Mill owner's daughter makes a greener Lawrence

**By Rebecca Griffin**  
*Eagle-Tribune Writer*

Picture a vacant lot in the heart of a city. Do you see broken bottles and discarded tires in a tangle of weeds?

Marianne E. Paley, 37, sees community gardens, parks and playgrounds.

Ms. Paley has been program manager since April of Groundworks Trust Lawrence, part of an international organization that helps neighborhoods take over vacant lots in their midst and turn them into places they can use and admire.

In Lawrence, there are many targets of opportunity. A 1997 report by the Urban Resource Institute of Merrimack College estimated the city had 850 vacant lots, with 305 in the process of being taken for back taxes.

Ms. Paley coordinates the work of businesses, nonprofit groups, city government and neighborhood volunteers to reclaim them.

"I think when you walk by a vacant lot and it's filled with trash and it's high with weeds, it's depressing and it makes you feel like people don't care," she said. "And if you walk by a clean lot where kids are playing pickup baseball or (the Mary) Immaculate Community Garden (on Maple Street) and you see people growing food, it's — I don't know — I think it's a strong statement about our city's importance to us."

Ms. Paley possesses the right mix of personality and training for such projects, said Ralph Goodno, president of the Merrimack River Watershed Council, the group that oversees Groundworks.

"She's methodical. She's very personable," he said. "People who meet her like her. That's part of the reason she can get so much done." He remembers how she organized a riverfront festival on six week's notice last year, complete with sculpture exhibit, kite-making, a salsa band and local youth dance and music groups.

Ms. Paley's background is in planning. She majored in urban studies at Brandeis University and received her master's degree in city planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

She lives in Newton but has family roots in Lawrence and does not like to admit she is not a Lawrencian. Her father, Bert Paley, restored and owns the Everett Mills, where his own immigrant mother once worked.

She was working as a property manager for her father two years ago when she found out about Groundworks and began volunteering on the group's steering committee.

Lately, she has been working with the Hamblet family, owners of Ferrous Technology on Island Street. The family wants to donate about three acres of former industrial land along the Merrimack River for city residents to enjoy as park land. Ms. Paley's job is to come up with money to design and landscape the site. She plans to solicit ideas from the city's youngsters.

"It seemed like a good opportunity to me. Because of our family business, I'm invested in the city, but my background and my interest is to do work like this, more than property management."

Ms. Paley said that she may organize the cleanups, but the real ideas and commitment come from people who live in the neighborhoods and make the vacant lots their own.

"I strongly believe we can give people the tools to be inventive and understand what they can do," she said. "I feel like we've seen a lot of interest in the program, in the potential to do something positive."