



Groundwork LAWRENCE

[www.groundworklawrence.org/projects/unionmec.pdf](http://www.groundworklawrence.org/projects/unionmec.pdf)

## *The Spicket River Cleanup:* Engaging the Community in Enhancing a Community Asset

The Spicket River Cleanup is an annual event along the banks of the Spicket River that has grown to be a household name in Lawrence. Begun as an annual event to engage residents in experiencing the river and seeing its compromised conditions first-hand, the Cleanup has become a symbol of the **Spicket River Greenway** plan for the community's reclamation of the river for increased open space and recreational opportunities. Since its inception four years ago, local residents, students, business owners, political candidates, and others have taken part in this autumn Saturday morning tradition to reclaim the Spicket River by pulling all kinds of debris from its banks. The event is as much a physical cleanup of Lawrence's natural environment as it is an awareness-raising event about the importance and potential held in a pristine, inviting riverside environment.

The river, which flows through Lawrence's poorest, most densely-built neighborhoods and into the Merrimack River downtown, has more than its fair share of non-natural inhabitants; tires, shopping carts, car parts, and litter of all imaginable forms have created a treasure hunt-type adventure as volunteers are challenged to tell about the "most bizarre" item their team found along the river. Residents who never realized the Spicket River existed are pleasantly surprised, once they begin climbing and combing both banks, to find a serene nature scene with a treetop canopy in the middle of downtown Lawrence. Working shoulder to shoulder, volunteers have a chance to reflect together on the vision for a Spicket River Greenway. "Site captains", who are stationed at intervals along the river to oversee volunteers and maintain safety, help volunteers see themselves as agents of change in realizing that vision.

Every year Groundwork Lawrence hopes to see less debris on the river and in the dumpsters than the last. Compared with year one, when volunteers could hardly keep ten dumpsters from overflowing with debris, our fourth cleanup in September 2005 marked the first significant signs of achievement: hundreds of volunteers came away from their cleanup sites pleased that most or all of the debris they could reach had been removed. This progress has shown us that the Spicket River Cleanup is having a lasting effect on the City and its culture. Groundwork firmly believes that the very act of cleaning the river banks is more than just the chore of collecting trash; participating in the Spicket River Cleanup is indeed a transformative experience, as evidenced by volunteers who have told us so. Even in heavy downpours of cold, steady rain, cleanup volunteers have been warmed by learning that they are part of a larger movement to reclaim the Spicket River. Signs posted at ten bridges over the Spicket River as part of the Clean Spicket Campaign help spread the message that volunteers' presence on the river banks tells as well: the Spicket River is a natural amenity that must be protected from misuse so that all Lawrencians may enjoy its bounty of beauty and serenity in the heart of a densely populated, densely built urban community.



## Groundwork Lawrence Role:

- Project catalyst
- Project manager
- Event planning
- Community outreach
- Partnership building
- Fundraising

## Project Impacts:

- Over 40 tons of debris removed from Spicket River banks since 2002
- Visibly cleaner river banks
- Annual institutional and corporate commitments of employee volunteers
- Increased public awareness about river's current conditions and future potential
- Culture of "keep it clean" and service-learning growing among high schoolers

## Project Funding:

### *In-Kind Donations*

- Jackson Lumber
- BFI
- G&Z Pizza
- The Ad King
- Central Catholic High School
- Lawrence-Methuen Community Coalition
- Arlington Community Trabajando
- New Balance
- Lawrence Athletic and Civic Club
- American Mobility
- Malden Mills
- Tripoli Bakery
- Lawrence CommunityWorks
- Urban Ecology Institute

### *Funding Support*

- [Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust](#)
- [Massachusetts Environmental Trust](#)

## Project Partners:

- [Arlington Community Trabajando](#)
- [Central Catholic High School](#)
- [Lawrence-Methuen Community Coalition](#)
- [Merrimack College](#)
- [New Balance](#)
- [Phillips Academy Andover](#)
- [Urban Ecology Institute](#)



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