

OBSERVER PHILANTHROPY

LIVES IN PHILANTHROPY

DREW BECHER

New York Restoration Project

BY JILLIAN BLUME

Even in his childhood, Drew Becher, Executive Director of the New York Restoration Project (NYRP), loved the outdoors. When other kids joined the Little League, he cut the grass, weeded the flowerbeds, and trimmed the bushes.

In high school, he launched a successful landscaping business, and in college, he tended to the landscaping around the fraternities and sororities of the University of Cincinnati. His first initiative was to launch a campaign to beautify the campus, and it developed into

a landscaping master plan adopted by the college.

Graduate school in Chicago led to a position with Mayor Daley that lasted for 12 years, creating his environmental and green agenda. Then former Washington D.C. Mayor Williams recruited him as his deputy for planning and economic development. Two and a half years ago, he was recruited by NYRP, and the city is now his home.

Originally founded by Bette Midler in 1995 to clean up Fort Washington Park, the non-profit New York Restoration Project now takes on a much broader agenda. They have removed over 1,890 tons of garbage from their project sites and reclaimed more than 400 acres of parkland along the Hudson and Harlem

rivers.

"I've always thought that public space and the way people think about where they live are so interconnected," Mr. Becher said. "But the public spaces within neighborhoods have been long overlooked, and people are disconnected from their community. We want to reconnect them." To this end, NYRP holds festivals, cultural celebrations, and conservation events in parks and community gardens that feature activities such as hayrides, bird-of-prey demonstrations, nature walks,



and live performances such as Afro-Caribbean music and dance. Their main focus is largely on community gardens. "These are people's little village greens, their green oasis, their little bit of nature in gritty New York City," Mr. Becher said. NYRP owns and operates 57 community gardens in all five boroughs and delivers environmental, science, and art education programs to 10,000 children a year. Programs include the Winter Bird Walk through the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Fort Tryon Park Spring Festival, Take a Walk New York: Red

Hook Waterfront Prowl, and the Summer Film Series, which is held at Swindler Cove Park. Nature In My Neighborhood, which covers the river, trees, gardening, and other areas, operates in 112 schools throughout the city.

Currently, they're working on an initiative to plant a million trees in the city by 2017, in partnership with Mayor Bloomberg and the Parks Department. So far they've planted around 100,000, and their fundraising continues toward meeting their \$35,000,000 goal. They have numerous other initiatives in the works, including rainwater harvesting and green roofs.

"My life and this work are one and the same," Mr. Becher said. "The public spaces in communities make people feel alive."

MELISSA A. BERMAN

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors

BY JILLIAN BLUME



After receiving a Ph.D in English from Stanford University, Melissa Berman, President and C.E.O. of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, realized that the academic life was not for her. That decision turned out to be good fortune for philanthropy on a local, national, and global level.

After working for the Federal Reserve Bank, she moved to a non-profit organization called The Conference Board. "It was my first experience with what philanthropy could do," Ms. Berman said about serving as Senior Vice President, Research and Program Development. The non-profit was founded in 1916 around events that forecast labor unrest and management corruption, such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. Today,

according to their mission statement, they conduct research and organize conferences in order to help businesses strengthen their performances so they can better serve society.

"I was excited about the opportunities that philanthropy offered to test new models for social change and progress," Ms. Berman said. She began to get involved with some of the big institutional foundations that

The Conference Board was getting funding from. "I became more and more intriguing about philanthropy as a lever for change and started to think about getting more deeply involved with philanthropy."

Ms. Berman has led New York-based Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors since January 2001, a non-profit with a mission to "help donors create thoughtful, effective philanthropy throughout the world." They work with donors who support numerous causes, including the arts, education, environment, and economic development. "I'm particularly intrigued by the kind of social change that creates livelihood and assets for people," she said.

Last year, the non-profit advised on about \$175,000,000 in giving across all the major issue areas and into 30 countries. They also "sponsor or support several focused initiatives aimed at specific areas of need around the world." Their list of current projects is broad-based. The New York State Music Fund gives individual grants and supports programs that expand public access to music. The Breakthrough Institute is a think tank committed to creating a new progressive politics. The Bridge Fund gives grants to Tibetan communities in China. The Earth Charter Fund works toward spreading its charter of principles for building a "just, sustainable, and peaceful global society for the 21st century." Ms. Berman also serves as director of City Harvest and the Foundation Center and is an adjunct professor at Columbia University's School of Business where she teaches philanthropy.

After 9/11, she found a source of personal comfort in being involved in an organization that was trying to help. "Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors did an enormous amount of advising about grant making that helped raise close to a \$100,000,000. So I felt like I was in the right place at the right time," she said. "I'm very fortunate to be in a job where I can help people make philanthropic investments that make the world a better place."

UJA-Federation of New York

UJA-Federation of New York — the largest local philanthropy in the world — is guided by a mission to care for those in need, rescue those in harm's way, and renew Jewish life in New York, in Israel, and 60 countries worldwide. It fulfills this mission by supporting a network of more than 100 agencies that touch the lives of 4.5 million people every day.

Every year, tens of thousands of people choose to give to UJA-Federation, trusting its proven track record to allocate funds for maximum impact and deliver results when and where it matters most. Donors cite UJA-Federation's historic record and judicious oversight, especially in challenging times, when every dollar counts.

UJA-Federation
of New York

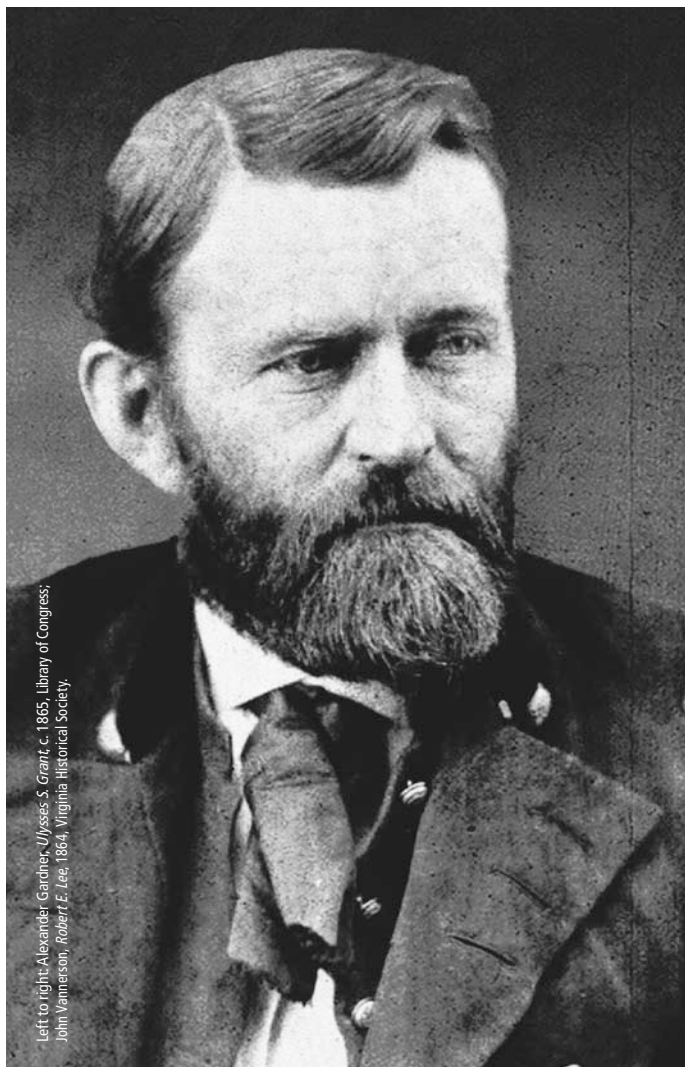
In this period of economic uncertainty, UJA-Federation is committed to caring for the millions who already depend on the critical services it supports, as well as the thousands more who may seek help. Just recently, UJA-Federation allocated an emergency grant of \$400,000 to the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty to keep its food pantries stocked. In the weeks ahead, UJA-Federation will

continue to monitor the situation and assess what is needed.

Beyond its work combating poverty, UJA-Federation

is pursuing opportunities to promote Jewish identity, strengthen the fabric of society in Israel, and so much more. All this is made possible because of individual donors whose collective impact is profound. Never has a single gift done so much for so many.

To learn more, please visit www.ujafedny.org.



Left to right: Alexander Gardner, Ulysses S. Grant, c. 1865, Library of Congress; John Vamerson, Robert E. Lee, 1864, Virginia Historical Society.

Opens October 17

Grant & Lee

In War and Peace

Free Fridays, 6–8PM

Upcoming Public Programs:

Sat, Oct 25, 10:00am–5:00pm
6th U.S. Colored Infantry Civil War Reenactors

Wed, Nov 12, 2:00pm
Exhibition Gallery Tours with Curator Kathleen Hulser

Fri, Nov 28
Civil War Reenactors, 10:00am–5:00pm
Abyssinian Baptist Church Choir, 12:30pm
Civil War Quiz Show with Kenneth Davis, 2:00pm

For more information on Public Programs, visit our web site.

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