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The 30-something, skateboarding South Carolina native is hard at work on Paine's Park, a mixed-use project that will give skaters and pedestrians more reasons to come to Philly and stay.

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students plant philly's trash tree in atlanta

JOE PETRUCCI
FRIDAY, APRIL 08, 2011

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In Old City, trash certainly isn't the problem it is in underserved parts of Greater Philadelphia. But considering the transient nature of the neighborhood, where young or highly mobile people move in and out for jobs and school, a lot of perfectly good stuff gets left behind in the trashroom. Josette Bonafino, who lives in a condo in Old City, has seen the scene play out over and over. About five years ago, she almost entirely furnished an apartment with other folks' trash for a friend moving from Italy with nothing more than a suitcase full of clothes.

Bonafino applied this pet peeve to the latest and newest project her nonprofit, [Multicultural Youth Exchange](#), showed off in Atlanta last week at the [National Service Learning Conference](#). Working with about 10 students from the [New Foundations Charter School](#) in Northeast Philly, MYX unveiled its 11-foot tall [Trash Tree](#) installation on Thursday.

"As consumerism grows, (waste) gets more out of control," says Bonafino. "When you're a 15 year-old you don't really think of all the stuff that can pile up."

The students then created some rough sketches of what the tree should look like and a carpenter friend of Bonafino's created a proper blueprint. The kids helped build and paint it and brought it to Atlanta earlier this week in pieces before erecting it on-site. About 25 students from New Foundations, a charter school heavily focused on service learning, successfully applied to participate in the trip -- others are working on a nutrition project and a video.

"We want the kids to experience projects from start to finish," says Bonafino, who wants to resurrect this project in the fall as part of Design Philadelphia, bringing in University of the Arts industrial design students to upcycle collected trash into original works of art, or "Trash Tree 2.0."

"And this was a real interactive piece."

When the conference concluded Saturday, visitors were able to "pick fruit off the tree," and take some new-found trash they can use home with them. The kids also took in the Phillies-Braves game in Atlanta before returning to Philly.

"We're trying to give all this trash a second life," Bonafino says.

JOE PETRUCCI is managing editor of *Flying Kite*. Send feedback [here](#).

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