

Queens community groups win awards

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Trees might not only grow in Brooklyn, but with the help of the Citizens Committee for New York, they might start in all five boroughs.

The nonprofit organization granted some early holiday wishes to several community groups this week by doling out the biannual New Yorkers for Better Neighborhoods awards. Ten Queens organizations were among the 35 selected.

"I couldn't think of a better support group not just for funding, but for training and resources and all sorts of things," said Fred Kress, 46, of Rosedale. Two organizations Kress works with, the Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces and the Cornucopia Society, received grants from Citizens Committee for New York City.

Both organizations work toward a greener community. The Cornucopia Society has several service projects in the works, including neighborhood cleanups, pruning street trees, and painting over graffiti. The Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces organizes a yearly conference for environmental organizations of all calibers.

Citizens Committee for New York representative Arif Ullah said his organization focuses on groups such as Kress' in order to address a community's direct needs. Not only does the Citizens Committee help provide grant money, they also offer training and resources to community organizations throughout the five boroughs.

"It's pretty progressive and amazing what's being done," Ullah said. "There are quite a few really great projects hap-

pening."

The Citizens Committee also awards grants to public schools through the bi-annual Mollie Parnis Dress Up Your School program. Announced this fall, four schools in Queens were among the 19 selected.

Funded by private sponsorship, the Citizens Committee not only chooses large organizations such as the Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Space, but many smaller, grassroots groups as well. The organization does not require formal nonprofit status from the government, which can pave the way for smaller, local groups to receive the grants.

Word-of-mouth is how Malissa Rivera heard about Citizens Committee. The Far Rockaway resident, 36, created her own community group. Culinary Kids Day Camp, which is a cooking school for adolescents, aged 13 to 21.

"It's kind of intense, but it's fun," she said. "It keeps the children busy."

The Culinary Kids Day Camp was designed to not only help kids cook, but to teach them about nutrition in the era of fast food. Rivera also aims to keep her 13-year-old-daughter Michelina's friends and classmates off the streets.

A caterer and culinary teacher, Rivera decided to use her expertise to help the community. Three days a week, five hours a day, she helped teach all kinds of different culinary adventures. Through the Citizens Committee, she was able to make the program more widespread.

"I was just tired of all the crime and stuff like that, and I decided to catapult the project," she said. "It's a pretty cool class."

