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Forum has dream for city stream

Gathering looks at what's wrong with Onondaga Creek, how to nurse it to health.

April 06, 2003

By **Delen Goldberg**
Contributing writer

Onondaga Creek may be full of trash, but it is also full of potential.

That's what more than 50 Syracuse officials, green-space advocates and residents agreed on Saturday. The group gathered in the auditorium of Corcoran High School to talk about ways to nurse the damaged waterway back to health.

Canopy, an umbrella organization of groups advocating green space, joined the city of Syracuse, the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry and Centers for Nature Education in sponsoring the forum.

"We wanted to take a step back and look at the entire creek corridor and the importance of restoring it for ecological and human reasons," said Sam Gordon, senior planner for the Syracuse Department of Community Development.

In poster sessions and panel discussions, participants learned about the science and ecology of rivers from SUNY ESF and Cornell University professors. They heard proposals for Onondaga Creek development from city officials. And they got words of encouragement - that the waterway is not a lost cause - from an expert.

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Keynote speaker Jeff Shoemaker, executive director of the Greenway Foundation in Denver, Colo., compared Onondaga Creek to the South Platte River near Denver.

Thirty years ago, the South Platte was polluted, smelly and strewn with trash, Shoemaker said. Today, it is a home for fish, a classroom for children and a calm getaway for city dwellers.

Shoemaker said the same could be true of Onondaga Creek.

Bea Gonzalez, Syracuse Common Council president, attended the forum as both a community leader and a concerned resident. She lives on South Salina Street and said the creek is practically her back yard.

"I see the creek as an abused and neglected member of our community, which could be very beautiful if taken care of," she said.

Fourth District Councilor Michael Atkins said he thinks Onondaga Creek is a diamond in the rough.

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