

THE GUARDIAN

JERRY ADELMANN

REPLACE HIS RIMLESS GLASSES WITH A pince-nez, add a bristling mustache, and Jerry Adelman, the vigorous 60-year-old president and CEO of Openlands, would bear more than a passing resemblance to another exceptional conservationist: Theodore Roosevelt. But unlike TR, the Openlands chief hasn't had the benefit of presidential fiat to make his green dreams a reality. Instead, by forging partnerships among activists, politicians, businesspeople, and ordinary citizens, Adelman has managed to save large swaths of the local landscape for future generations. "Cities are not usually thought of as a nature preservation area," he says. "But Openlands is interested in all the dimensions of green space: urban gardens, prairies, ball fields."

Even in a 30-year career rich in ecological accomplishments, 2009 stands out as a banner year for Adelman. Last fall his organization introduced its Openlands Lakeshore Preserve: 77 acres of woodlands, bluffs, and ravines situated on the Lake Michigan shoreline in the southern part of Fort Sheridan. Formerly owned by the U.S. Navy, the property might have become a gated community had Openlands not taken possession. The government didn't charge for the land, but the organization's ongoing capital campaign has raised more than 75 percent of a planned \$12 million to ensure the site's viability in perpetuity.

A native of Lockport, Adelman realized in the late 1970s that the land southwest of Chicago, perceived by many as a blighted rust belt, actually held great potential. He was especially drawn to the region along the old Illinois & Michigan Canal, a 19th-century relic that had once provided an invaluable link between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. "Envisioning [as he puts it today] a future grounded in the past," Adelman not only created a thriving modern-day canal corridor—which connected 49 communities along 120 miles of waterways—but he also invented a whole new kind of national park. Today, the National Park Service recognizes nearly 50 national heritage areas—and Adelman's canal corridor was the first.

His partner in the canal project was a Chicago-based land-conservation group known then as the Open Lands Project. After overseeing the canal corridor for several years, Adelman assumed leadership of Openlands in 1988. "I love this region, and I love what I do," he says. "There is always something new and exciting to do."

Or as Teddy Roosevelt told a Chicago audience 111 years ago: "Far better it is to dare mighty things."

—GEOFFREY JOHNSON



"I WAS REALLY FEELING A TREMENDOUS SENSE OF URGENCY IN PREPARING OUR CURRENT GENERATION."

THE NURTURER

SARAH ELIZABETH IPPEL

SARAH ELIZABETH IPPEL UNLOCKS A SMALL WOODEN DOOR AND PULLS out two warm, fresh eggs. "Thank you, girls," she coos at the chickens, some of the permanent residents at the Academy for Global Citizenship, a charter school on the Southwest Side near Midway Airport. The eggs likely will go into the next morning's student breakfast, and, with that, a zero gets added into the spreadsheet that tracks "food miles"—the distance ingredients travel to get to the school.

If it sounds unusual, it is. No other Chicago public elementary school raises chickens. And few can claim to serve an all-organic breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack made fresh on the premises every day—sometimes with new eggs or, during growing season, with vegetables from an outdoor container garden. "Everything is made from scratch," says Ippel, the academy's founder and executive director. "All of our vegetables are fresh. Nothing comes out of a can."

The unique foodservice arrangement in the midst of the Chicago Public Schools bureaucracy goes a long way to distinguish the two-year-old Academy for Global Citizenship from its peers. So do the worm-filled composting bins in every classroom; the large wind turbine that sits by the front door; and the daily 4 p.m. yoga practice that is mandatory for the entire 150-student population of kindergarten through second grade. But Ippel knows that she can't unleash unorthodox practices in the traditional public-school setting and expect them to catch on if the academy isn't a success. So she's extending the academic day and year (her students get 36 percent more instruction time annually than the average CPS student) and working toward authorization as an International Baccalaureate school (there are only three public IB primary programs in Chicago). "If we are going to make the case that organic food and yoga and environmental education are imperative throughout the system, the test scores have to be off the charts," she says. The early outlook is good. In 2008-2009, the school's first year of operation, the students on average progressed 1.85 years of literacy development in ten months, as measured by the STEP (Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress) assessment administered by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute.

A native of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ippel was only 23 when, in 2005, she submitted her first proposal for a globally focused, "green" charter school to the Chicago Board of Education. "I was really feeling a tremendous sense of urgency in preparing our current generation," she says. It took two more proposals, many door-to-door visits in the Archer Heights/Garfield Ridge neighborhood where the school is based, and much private fundraising to get approval in 2007. "I received an incredible amount of support from people who said [they] believe that this will shift our educational system," says Ippel, who describes her funding today as a mix of public money (from CPS), corporate sponsorships, grants, and individual donations. The extra money she raises helps pay for the organic food program and plans for the new school that she hopes to see built by 2011. (As executive director, Ippel is responsible for strategic planning and fundraising; the school has a principal, Anne Gillespie, who oversees academic instruction.)

When Ippel describes the planned new school, with its net-zero-energy building and an urban farm, her eyes light up with possibility. Already, the academy feels cramped in the 12,000-square-foot former barrel factory it calls home. "We have learned to love our little piece of cement," she says. "But it's time to work our way out."

—CASSIE WALKER