

ARBOR VITAE

THE NEWSLETTER OF TREES FOR CAPITOL HILL — SPRING 2010



Old and New Volunteers Turn Out for Tree Planting

Margaret Missiaen, Vice-President, TFCH

The third Saturday in November turned out to be a perfect tree planting day with temps in the 50's. In most locations the ground was soft and the digging easy after recent rains. At all the sites, the holes were dug before we arrived with the big red truck from Merrifield Garden Center.

Trees for Capitol Hill (TFCH) and the District's Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) coordinate our plantings to make sure that we do not try planting in the same locations. UFA budgets for 400–500 street trees in each ward each year but cannot come close to filling all the empty spaces.

Trees for planting are chosen in October from Merrifield's extensive inventory of 8–10' shade trees. This year volunteers selected a wide variety of trees, including a Chinese fringe tree, a larch, a dawn redwood, copper beeches and Chinese pistaches. In the past, we were constrained by the designated species plan developed for each street in the 1870's. Many of you will remember the beautiful arching American elms in the 600 block of North Carolina. As we now know when disease strikes, all of the mature trees lining a street die within a few years. East Capitol is losing its mature elms very rapidly. With a wider variety of trees planted along the streets, some of the trees will be resistant should a new disease arrive.

Our planting locations covered a large area of Capitol Hill from the 400 block of E Street, SE to the 1100 block of I Street, NE and the 1700 block of Potomac Avenue. At every location we were met by enthusiastic neighbors who had dug large holes in small tree boxes and were anxiously awaiting the arrival of their trees. Strone Sparks and Evelyn Timberlake were ready to welcome their new London plane-tree when it arrived a 8 a.m. in the 400 block of E Street, SE. Vicki Breman had campaigned for years for a tree for the empty tree box in the 300 block of A Street, SE. She spent many hours removing the English ivy and liriopse that had taken over the space after a dead tree fell years ago. The new London planetree will join two red maples and another planetree that TFCH volunteers have planted on this block in recent years.

The new planetree in the 600 block of A Street, NE will be cared for by the whole Kozeny family—Jill, Tom, Mary, Andrew and Teddy. A swamp white oak and crape myrtle will help restore the tree canopy at the corner of 9th Street and Maryland Avenue, NE.

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Tony Lopez and Nick Alberti unload a tree from the Merrifield truck.



Tony Lopez removes stump.

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On I Street, NE Johann Yurgen will care for his new red maple. There are few mature trees on this block where we hope to enlist Johann and his neighbors to plant and care for at least one new tree each year. Moving on to the 1300 block of F Street, NE, we encountered the remnants of a large stump. While we were debating what to do, Christy Davis contacted her neighbors and soon returned with an ax and a pry bar. Tony Lopez and Mark Grace made short work of the stump and the new tree settled happily into its enlarged space.

Elizabeth Nelson again recruited residents of the North Lincoln Park neighborhood to plant several new trees. New volunteers Jennie Kopelson and Kyle McNally proved their worth by digging holes before we arrived and pitching in to help plant several trees after they planted the Chinese fringe tree in front of Jennie's home.

We are always grateful to Rich Cottrell and Tony Lopez from Merrifield who deliver the trees and provide technical assistance as needed. A grant from the Capitol Hill Community Foundation helps support our tree plantings.



Volunteers plant dawn redwood on Constitution Ave.

Just beyond the neighborhood...

Barbara Richey

Looking for a walk or bike ride beyond Capitol Hill? You might consider visiting the **Metropolitan Branch Trail** (MBT) that opens officially on National Trails Day, June 5, with an all-day celebration "Meet the Met", hosted by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. This exciting addition to NE Washington is an 8-mile trail that runs from Union Station to Silver Spring, Md., along the Metropolitan Branch Line of the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad corridor. The trail passes through numerous vibrant and historic neighborhoods as it weaves back and forth from trail to bike lane, and a short on-road section. While it will surely be a well-used commuting route for cyclists, it will also be a playground and linear park for the neighborhoods it passes through. Along the trail's length, there are already a giant mural, community gardens developing, a bike station (at Union Station) and more. Construction on the important trail section between New York Ave. NE and Franklin Street, NE. is expected to be completed early in May.

To lend a leafy canopy to this new landscape Casey Trees and NoMa Business Improvement District (BID) have been planting trees along the streets, in residential backyards and on commercial property leading to the Metropolitan Branch Trail and will move on to planting trees along the trail's borders in the summer. Casey Trees has incorporated a

novel approach to watering these and other trees around the city with Casey Trees Water By-Cycle, which utilizes bicycle carts equipped with long hoses and access to water from fire hydrants — a green (and more efficient) approach to reach trees with limited parking, fulfilling an essential task for our green city.



The newly-constructed, but not yet paved, section of the Metropolitan Branch Trail between New York Ave. NE and Franklin Street, NE.

(Photo: Heather Deutsch)

15 Years • 5,000 Trees

Margaret Missiaen, Treasurer, Trees For Capitol Hill



Trees for Capitol Hill's **first pruning workshop** took place at the Eastern Market metro plaza on March 2, 1996. The class taught by horticulturist and arborist, Jim Adams, was the next step for volunteers who had learned to plant and water street trees. Participants were given a certificate and more importantly a permit from DC's Trees and Landscape Division to prune small street trees. My new skill was soon put to use when I discovered a mountain of linden branches next to the SE Library.

Someone had decided to fight crime by attacking trees in the metro plaza. The trees on the west side of the plaza were severely damaged when the ends of all the low branches were cut. I carefully cut the damaged branches back to the main trunk, leaving the branch collar to close the wound. I saw Jim a few weeks later, and he complimented me on a job well done. That was all I needed to start seeing every small tree as a candidate for structural pruning. Young trees will not grow up to be healthy adults without some training. I found parenting skills can be redirected, sparing adult children unwanted advice.

Arborists recommend pruning trees in the winter when they are dormant—perfect for a gardener whose other activities are on hold. In Jan. 1997 after I retired, I started pruning the trees planted by Trees for Capitol Hill. In no time, I was able to find satisfaction in the improved appearance of the small trees, removing low branches over the sidewalk and street. When another volunteer, Tom Hillyard, joined me with his ladder, we took on larger trees often removing a double leader. We would be out pruning several hours at a time. Tom had a lot more stamina than I did. Some days I thought I would have to lie down on the sidewalk to rest on my way home.

Looking back, we estimated we pruned over a 1,000 trees in four years. Tom retired, but I continued. Everywhere I looked there were newly planted trees that needed just a little help to grow up to be healthy mature trees. Increased

funding for the Urban Forestry Administration (formerly the Tree Division) brought 100's of new trees to Capitol Hill starting with Pennsylvania Ave. and East Capitol Street in 2000. When John Thomas, a friend from the US Botanic Garden, was named the city's Chief Forester, I felt I had a clear mandate to care for the new street trees. After a few years of requesting that my sons and husband give me tree help for Christmas, Ed presented me with a beautiful

certificate that gave me 20 hours of tree labor each year. With Ed and a wheelbarrow, and an offer from the Business Improvement District workers to pick up the limbs at public trash cans, my productivity soared.

Now my goal was to do 40 trees a week during the 10-week pruning season that began on Jan. 1. Most years, we exceeded that number, pruning a record 488 trees in 2008. We learned a lot over the years, not only about trees but also about people. Most thanked us, but some questioned our credentials, including a few police officers. The Casey Trees citizen forester training program enhanced our skills and provided us with photo ID's and vests, gaining us much more respect on the street.

The cold weather in early January and the snow in February, compressed the pruning season this year to 7 weeks. I learned to maneuver my wheelbarrow

between snow banks and over mounds at the intersections. No ladder needed when you can stand on top of the snow to reach the trees. Then Ed spent a week in Brazil. We made up for lost time by pruning 42 trees in one day. I reached my goal of 5,000 street trees pruned on March 11, 2010 somewhere along 3rd Street, NE.

I'm sure I will not be able to stop looking at the trees and thinking about how to improve the branch structure, but I'll limit myself to caring for small trees near my home. Those new trees around Eastern Market and Hine Jr. High look like good candidates for next year.



Margaret Missiaen pruning willow oak on PA Ave. SE.

2002 Tree of the Year at Risk

Water Oak, Quercus Nigra



Water oak at Friendship House, 600 block South Carolina, Ave. SE.

Restoration and development of the Friendship House property could threaten our Tree of the Year in 2002, the water oak located on the South Carolina side of the house. The Friendship House Association moved out of the building in 2008 after filing for bankruptcy. Altus Realty Partners purchased the property in March 2010 and will restore the exterior. Plans to convert the property to residential use are still being developed.

The developer will be required to protect the water oak and other large trees on the property during construction. However, these regulations are difficult to enforce and damage done by heavy equipment and construction materials stored in the root zone is often not visible until long after the project is complete. The major concern is soil compaction around the roots which extend well beyond the 70 foot-canopy of this tree.

Water oaks are native to the southeastern United States and often found in wet, swampy areas. The leaves are most commonly shaped like a spatula being broad and rounded at the top and narrow at the base. The tree is semi-evergreen, holding its leaves well into the winter. Reports of an underground spring on the Friendship House grounds may explain why this tree thrived in this location. Few other large water oaks have been identified in the District. The size of this tree—55 feet tall, 132 inches in circumference (42" diameter) and a spread of 60 to 70 feet—makes it a champion.

Congratulations to Margaret Missiaen

Each year Capitol Hill Community Foundation recognizes individuals who have made significant contribution to our community. This year the Foundation has awarded one of the Capitol Hill Community Achievement Awards to Margaret Missiaen, co-founder of Trees for Capitol Hill, for her extensive work on behalf of our neighborhood street trees. It is through her work of organizing annual tree plantings with a small team of volunteers and local homeowners, coordinating with the city's Urban Forestry Administration for tree locations, purchasing trees at Merri-fields Gardens, working with commercial tree pruners to salvage damaged trees, tree pruning classes for residents, educating the residents on care of trees, and her tireless dedication to pruning the street trees (see article on page 5) that we have a robust and beautiful tree presence on Capitol Hill.

Thank you to the Capitol Hill Community Foundation for recognizing this lofty effort. It is applauded by those of us who work with her.

The benefit dinner is on May 6. Details can be found at www.capitolhillcommunityfoundation.org

TFCH has a new partnership with National Capital Bank. The Bank will make a contribution to TFCH to encourage customers to enroll in their e-statement campaign.

Going Greener with Trees for Capitol Hill, Inc.

Elizabeth Nelson

Our urban forest took a giant leap forward with the annual fall planting event organized by Trees for Capitol Hill, Inc. (TFCH). A crew of TFCH volunteers escorted the Merrifield delivery truckload of eighteen (!) trees through the neighborhood. At each stop they helped wrestle the trees into holes pre-dug by the neighbors, then righted them, cut away their wrappings, back-filled the soil, and topped them with mulch. The Capitol Hill Garden Club provided bulbs that were planted around the root balls. Long before the trees leaf-out in May, those daffodils will be on-duty, reminding passers-by that winter can't last forever.

Tree lovers of all stripes will be pleased with the new arrivals, especially those not often seen on Capitol Hill, including the impressive dawn redwood across the Street from 1364 Constitution Ave. NE and it's dainty neighbor, the Chinese fringe tree, a half a block east at 1402 Constitution Ave.



Maury students promise to love, water and protect their new tree.

NE. As fascinating as they are, they will not be half so well-loved as those planted on the Maury ES playground.

In the late 1980's, a lone oak was planted in the Maury playground during a previous TFCH planting extravaganza. In the years since it has been the only source of shade—a real hardship for the summer program at the school. But it is now flanked by two Chinese pistache trees, known for their will to live and their splendid fall color, planted with great enthusiasm by the Maury family. The youngest helpers made a promise to “love, water, and protect” the trees thus ensuring they will enjoy a long and leafy lives. TFCH is joined in its efforts by the North Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association and the Capitol Hill Community Foundation which con-

tributed to the purchase of the trees. Elizabeth can be reached at Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com.

New Street Trees Need Your Help

The Dept. of Transportation's Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) began its annual street tree planting in early Dec. 2009 and hopes to have 3,000 street trees planted in the District by May 2010. Planting locations are based on requests made to the Citywide Call Center before July 15, 2009. Call 311 to request city services, including tree removal or pruning as well as planting. Please note that tree planting requests for next winter must be made before July 15, 2010.

The Ward 6 planting was scheduled to begin in February after Wards 5, 7 and 8. The heavy snowfalls slowed work for several weeks delaying planting on Capitol Hill until late March. I have seen newly planted trees along 4th Street in SE and NE. Four newly planted redbuds are flowering on Walter Street, SE and 5 swamp white oaks filled empty tree spaces on 12th Street, SE near G Street.

The city's Chief Forester, John Thomas, is asking residents to help the new trees survive by watering during dry spells for the first two years. Residents who sign partnership agreement to water, mulch and monitor the health of specific

trees will receive free watering bags and instructions from UFA. Watch for newly planted trees between the sidewalk and curb near your home. Many of the newly planted trees have an identification label attached to a branch. I have seen a scarlet oak, several seedless sweet gums and a cherry.

The UFA website (ufa.ddot.dc.gov) has a wealth of information including the location of trees to be planted this year: go to Information, click on Tree Planting List. The section on Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) is also very helpful. There you can also read about a new program designed to help residents who cannot afford to remove a hazardous tree from their property. For more information about this program, call 202-671-5133.

UFA now has 16 certified arborists on staff who are responsible for issuing permits, enforcing regulations and caring for approximately 140,000 street trees in the District. When it comes to watering the new trees, no one is better positioned to help than the individuals who live near the trees.

Contact Margaret Missiaen if you have any questions.

Trees For Capitol Hill
647 South Carolina Ave., SE
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Trees For Capitol Hill

Who we are:

Trees For Capitol Hill, Inc. is a DC non-profit organization dedicated to improving the landscape of public areas on the Hill. If you would like to receive our periodic newsletter or make a tax-deductible contribution, please send a check for \$10 (or more!) to our treasurer, Margaret Missiaen, at 647 South Carolina Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003. Checks should be made out to "Trees For Capitol Hill".



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