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# ARBOR VITAE

NEWSLETTER OF TREES FOR CAPITOL HILL, INC. ----2015

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## What Kind of Tree is *That?*

*Margaret Missiaen, Vice-President, TFCH*

Trees for Capitol Hill continues to augment Capitol Hill's tree canopy in cooperation with the Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) and Casey Trees. Our volunteers are working toward the shared goal of adding diversity to our urban forest. Planting a wide range of tree species along our streets ensures that some trees will survive if a species-specific disease appears, e.g. Dutch elm disease. I feel this diversity also serves an educational purpose. My neighbors often ask me to identify street trees, especially ones that are not maples or oaks. The UFA is helping educate residents by leaving the ID tags on recently planted trees. Photos and detailed descriptions are available online.

Our first stop on November 22, 2014 was Garfield Park where Bonnie Pilliod and friends planted a memorial linden (*Tilia ×europaea*). These friends of Janet Kohn worked with Margaret Missiaen for several months to select and plant a tree in her honor. [See page 2.] This team dug the hole on Friday leaving a mound of soil. By morning the soil was frozen solid—this rarely happens in November. A delay in the arrival of the Merrifield Garden Center truck allowed the volunteers to warm up by hacking the soil into small chunks. It really was almost unbelievably frigid with a daytime high that didn't venture past freezing; definitely the coldest planting day anyone could remember.

Suzanne Wells and Stephen Sweeney organized a group of students and parents to dig the holes for 5 trees at Tyler Elementary School. [See page 5.]

On Constitution Ave. NE, Brian Plitt and other residents of the same condominium are turning their backyard into an oasis with large specimens of Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) and Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*). The large holes Brian dug turned up bricks, stones and other

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interesting artifacts. Here the soil conditions appeared to be much better than in tree boxes along the street.

Thanks to Elizabeth Nelson, the 1300 block of North Carolina is becoming a virtual arboretum. This year a shagbark hickory (*Carya ovate*), dove tree (*Davidia involucrata*), franklinia (*Franklinia alatamaha*) and an 'April blush' camellia were added to the collection that includes a copper beech (*Fagus sylvatica purpurea*), black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) and katsura (*ercidiphyllum japonica*). The last stop was in the 600 block of F Street, NE where Michaelen Crowell planted a Rose of Sharon.

Our relationship with Merrifield Garden Center has been vital to our efforts for more than 20 years. We want to thank Michael Fahey in the wholesale department and especially Tony Lopez who navigates narrow streets with a large truck and guides the 200-lb. trees into the holes. We miss Rich Cottrell, our longtime advisor at Merrifield. [See page 3.]

Without you, we could not do our work. If you are interested in sponsoring a tree for public space (parks, public schools and tree boxes), please contact Margaret Missiaen at [margaretmisiaen@gmail.com](mailto:margaretmisiaen@gmail.com).



Friends of Janet Kohn plant a living memorial in Garfield Park

Left to right: Jane O'Grady, Bonnie Pilliod, Margaret Missiaen, Mark Grace, Muffie Houstoun (with back to camera) and Ruth Wasse with Max



# Memorial Tree Planted in Garfield Park

*Jane O'Grady*

It was a satisfying moment for friends of Janet Kohn when they were able to participate in the planting of a linden tree in Garfield Park this past November. Janet was a valued friend and colleague as well as a labor lawyer and social activist. The group of friends had worked with Janet on legislative issues in the 80's and 90's. When she died, they concluded that a tree planting would most honor her and her lifelong avocation tending to her garden. The culmination of a search for location and appropriate tree came to fruition with the help of the Trees for Capitol Hill. They believe it will flourish in its new home in Garfield Park where many neighbors can also appreciate its beauty.

# Rich Cottrell - 1942-2015

*Elizabeth Nelson*

Rich finally left us in February. He had been ill for a long time, soldiering on through one thing after another since well before his retirement. I might not hear from him for a few weeks – or even a few months – I'd get worried – and then one morning I'd check my email and there would be a note from Rich with either scandalous jokes or carefully chosen advice culled from the various websites he frequented.

At the time I wrote the article below, I was already grieving his loss – prematurely, as it turned out. He made it back to three more shopping trips and two more plantings. He almost made it to the 2014 planting; it was on his calendar and he was holding his own, but at the last minute he had to cancel. For the first time, we had to go it alone.

There's a lot to remember him by, but one black gum is a special reminder for me. We planted it at least fifteen years ago but it never formed a proper leader. I tried various forms of persuasion without success. It's beautiful and healthy – but very, very short. On his last planting trip, Rich showed me one last thing to try, a snip at the right place on a particular branch. I did just that. And now I see signs that maybe, just maybe, that little gum is going to reach for the sky.

We'll be planting a tree in Rich's memory this coming November. A sycamore – kind of an inside joke. Unlike Margaret, I never much cared for them. But Rich said they reminded him of the place he grew up. So that's what he'll get. A sycamore. And you better believe we'll see to it that it's well watered.

## Rich Cottrell - An Appreciation

*Elizabeth Nelson (reprinted from 2012)*

When Rich announced his retirement from Merrifield, it knocked me completely off balance. Sure, he had been talking about it for a year or two and doing his best to prepare us to continue without him. He'd been introducing us to other Merrifield staff. And his tone in imparting planting instructions (not too deep, measure the rootball, don't bring the soil level higher than it was before – the roots need to breathe!) had taken on a new urgency. But somehow I allowed myself to believe that the awful day would never come. Don't misunderstand; as a recent retiree myself, I know as well as anyone that he has a right to his rest and a change of pace. I just can't remember a time Before Rich.

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Rich Cottrell at the nursery in 2014



Beth Purcell, John McLaughlin, Rich Cottrell planting at 3rd and D Sts. NE, April 1997



Rich and Nick Alberti measuring root ball on Potomac Ave., November 2009

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I'm not much of a shopper but I looked forward, for 364 days each year, to the magical trip to Merrifield. Beth would drive and Rich would always be waiting for us. No matter the weather, it was pure pleasure finding the perfect tree for every spot on our list – and even a few impulse purchases. I called it my “Christmas shopping”. Rich taught us how to look for straight trunks and strong leaders – and which growing conditions were required for each tree to thrive. He is the Obi-wan Kenobi of arborists; the Grand Master of landscape design. We all learned so much from him – or at least he did his best to teach us.

And then, one Saturday in November, “Santa Claus” (AKA Rich) would appear in his bright red truck (no sleigh in these climes) loaded with the promise of a happy spring and verdant summers to come. He didn't have to do it, but he always came on the truck himself. In theory, we were expected to do all the digging and schlepping but Rich and his Merrifield assistants always pitched in and did way more than we had any right to expect. Good thing, too, as there's no way we could have wrestled those 200 lb trees off the truck without his brawn and ability to maneuver.

Will we manage without him? I suppose so. We have to. We're not going to stop planting. But for the first time in many years I'm not already longing for that October trip to Merrifield.

Do we wish him well? My goodness, yes! If there's a will, there's a way and we are all determined to stay in touch with Rich. He's been very faithful about “clipping” articles off the internet and forwarding email that he knows will be of interest and useful to us. I've had several of these missives already since his retirement. And we'll find some way to lure him back on the Hill to survey his “progeny”. Next time you pause to admire our urban forest, take a moment to think of Rich and beam your thanks in his direction.



Rich (3rd from left) with the planting crew in November 2013



Tony Lopez with Rich in November 2013

If you would like to participate in the planting of Rich's memorial tree, or have a location to suggest, please send an email to [Elizabeth\\_knits@yahoo.com](mailto:Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com).

# TFCH Supporting Schools

*Elizabeth Nelson*

TFCH got its start in response to the District's failure to replace the street trees on Capitol Hill back in the dark days of the 1990's. Since then, the Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) has stepped up to the plate and, in recent years, we've had to look around a bit for planting opportunities, turning to parks, school yards and other places not benefitting from UFA's attentions.

I live near Eliot-Hine Middle School (1830 Constitution Avenue NE) and often walk that way, either to exercise my dogs or when spending time with the students. The property occupies an entire city block and had very few trees on it – seemingly a grand opportunity for a mass planting. However, when I contacted the school, I discovered that the City was already trying to make that happen – the parties just needed a little help with coordination to pull it off. So, TFCH stepped in to facilitate and we turned our sights to Tyler Elementary School (1001 G Street SE) as a suitable home for new trees. The stories of those planting experiences follow.

## Tyler ES

*Suzanne Wells, Tyler parent*

Tyler Elementary School was thrilled to be selected for one of Trees for Capitol Hill's planting sites this past November. Tyler's Outdoor Classroom has almost 60 trees in it, and the school is working to teach students about the importance of trees to the environment and how to identify trees. This past year, several art classes did projects centered around trees, and the 4th graders at the school participated in a Tyler Junior Forrester program where they learned to identify ten different trees in the Outdoor Classroom

Representatives from TFCH came out to Tyler in the summer of 2014, and identified locations for five new trees. A week before the trees were planted, volunteers dug the holes for the trees. On planting day, parents and students helped plant the trees. Thanks to Trees for Capitol Hill, Tyler now has two honey locusts, a yellowwood, a sassafras, and a red buckeye surrounding the school.





Eliot-Hine planting crew – proud of their work



Measuring the rootball



Digging a hole

# Eliot-Hine MS

*Elizabeth Nelson*

The District Department of the Environment (DDOE) is on a mission to increase the tree canopy and Eliot-Hine Middle School is one of the most recent beneficiaries. With funding from DDOE, Casey Trees orchestrated the planting of fifty trees on the school grounds in mid-March. There is a huge variety of species including hickory, Kentucky coffee tree, redbud, oak, tupelo, horse chestnut, river birch, serviceberry, linden, and hornbeam – something of particular interest for every season of the year.

The first group of seven was installed by the Eliot-Hine students, themselves with the help of chaperones from TFCH. They received classroom instruction from Casey Trees experts on the biology, environmental impact, and proper care of trees – and safe planting practices, then were sent to the front yard to translate their learning into action. The kids were fascinated by their discovery of insects and worms, and old building materials - and they got quite the workout.

The remainder of the trees were planted the following Saturday by a huge group of volunteers from across the city, TFCH members among them. After mulching and staking, each tree received a gray plastic trunk protector to safeguard the delicate bark from weed-whackers and lawnmowers and was fitted with a watering bag. Casey Trees is overseeing the first season’s watering, so there is every hope that the trees will thrive.

Eliot-Hine parent, Heather Schoell, extended her thanks to all involved in the greening efforts, "It was tremendous how so many people came out to plant. The Eliot Hine community is truly grateful."

The trees are still very small, of course, but they are already making a tremendous difference in the streetscape. One neighbor commented that the C Street side of the building, one of the first things visitors to the District see on their way into town past RFK Stadium, had the appearance of an “abandoned factory”, but now looks well cared for and delightful to the eye.

Swing by to admire the scene when you’re out for a run or walking the dog.



Learning the proper way to swing a pick

# Tree of the Year, Japanese Pagoda Tree

*Elizabeth Nelson*

Our tree of the year is *Sophora Japonica*, otherwise known as the Japanese Pagoda Tree or Chinese scholar tree. A medium to large deciduous tree that typically matures to 50-75 feet tall, it is native to China and Korea, but not to Japan. In late summer it is covered in panicles of small, delicately scented flowers that drift to the ground, covering it with a blanket of white. The flowers are replaced with attractive pods that persist into winter. Not only is it the sophora a large and attractive flowering shade tree, it is very hardy in urban settings and its flowers are used in traditional Chinese medicine, containing flavonoids reputed to exhibit antioxidant activity and support circulatory system health.

In 1996, TFCH received the \$7,500 Keller grant from CHAMPS and used some of the funds to have 13 pagoda trees planted in the parks along Pennsylvania Avenue, between 7th and 9th Streets SE. Those trees make the metro plaza a shady oasis on hot summer days.

If you'd like to see some large specimens in person, visit Lincoln Park where they put on quite a show around the perimeter.



Sophora on the north side of Lincoln Park, near 12th Street NE

# Scientists Say: Living Near Trees is Good for Your Health

*Mark Grace, Secretary, TFCH*

Well, this is almost too embarrassing to write for fear of being called a ‘master of the obvious’ but here goes.... Apparently, living near trees is good for ones’ health.

Researchers, publishing in the open access journal *Scientific Reports*, conducted a study on neighborhood green space and health in a large urban center and found that natural environments can enhance health perceptions. Their studies show that people who live in neighborhoods with a higher density of trees on their streets report significantly higher health perception and significantly less cardio-metabolic conditions (controlling for socio-economic and demographic factors).

The researchers were able to compare the beneficial effect of trees in a neighborhood to other well-known demographic factors that are related to improved health, such as age and wealth. They found that “having 10 more trees in a city block, on average, improves health perception in ways comparable to an increase in annual personal income of \$10,000 and moving to a neighborhood with \$10,000 higher median income or being 7 years younger.”

And it get’s better if you are concerned about your cardio health. For cardio-metabolic conditions — a category that includes not only heart disease, but stroke, diabetes, obesity and more — the study similarly found that an increase of 11 trees per city block was “comparable to an increase in annual personal income of \$20,000 and moving to a neighborhood with \$20,000 higher median income or being 1.4 years younger.”

Said Marc Berman, a co-author of the study “...we found a significant independent effect of trees on the street on health...” “It seemed like the effect was strongest for the public [trees]. Not to say the other trees don’t have an impact, but we found stronger effects for the trees on the street.”

So, with your newfound wealth consider perhaps a donation to, or volunteering with Trees for Capitol Hill (TFCH). It’s an investment in your health!

## Website Shows Empty Tree Spaces

*Margaret Missiaen*

A new website, Get D.C. Trees ([getdctrees.org](http://getdctrees.org)), was unveiled on Arbor Day last April. The website came from Code for D.C. programmer Emanuel Feld, who saw that the Urban Forestry Administration had data on every street tree box and was happy to share it. The map of the District is covered with orange dots indicating every empty tree space. Clicking on one of the dots shows you the address and allows you to request a tree. You can also volunteer to care for a new tree and can check it out in Street View. I clicked on several dots near the Eastern Market Metro and realized that I needed to go out a look at the spaces. Some of the dots are near street corners where a mature tree would obstruct the view in the intersection. Dots in the 400 block of 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE showed where dead trees had been removed recently. However, Street View dated May 2014 showed the trees. I recommend that anyone using the site, check out the location before requesting a tree.



# A Tree of One's Own

*Elizabeth Nelson*

For the second year, TFCH will assist neighbors wanting trees for their own yards. Our “friends and family” can purchase a tree through us for planting in November 2015. Owners will be required to prepare a hole on their property and pay the cost of the tree (at our discounted price) and a pro-rated share of the shipping costs. TFCH will select and purchase the tree, arrange delivery and assist in planting. Trees will be selected by the TFCH shopping team (from a list of species preferred by the sponsor) during their annual visit to Merrifield Garden Center (MGC). These trees are quite large, typically 1-2" caliper, and not inexpensive. But you will have a more mature tree than what you could bring home and plant by yourself; the discount makes them much more affordable; and you will pay much less in shipping and installation costs than if you purchased those services from MGC. If you are interested in participating in this program, contact Elizabeth Nelson, [elizabeth\\_knits@yahoo.com](mailto:elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com) or 202.543.3512.

# Don't Smother those Roots!

*Elizabeth Nelson*

On unwished-for by-product of the recent increase in landscaping, hard-scaping and basement-digging is the generation of extra dirt. All too often, homeowners and contractors attempt to get rid of it by dumping it in the nearest tree box. They may think that it will do no harm, but they are sadly mistaken. Changing the soil level, even near a mature tree, will prevent adequate oxygen from reaching the roots and will kill the tree. This can happen more quickly than you might suppose.

If you can't persuade the perpetrator to dispose of dirt properly, notify the UFA. They'll step in and insist that the situation be corrected before the tree is damaged.

Soil piled in this tree box will kill the tree



# Volunteers Needed

*Elizabeth Nelson*

Volunteers are needed, wanted and appreciated. We are always looking for tree-huggers to assist with the fall plantings. If you know of anyone who would enjoy that activity, please lasso them! We are also in dire need of a newsletter designer. We are limping along (or you would not be receiving this publication) but we eager to find a more permanent solution. If you have publishing skills and can help with this annual effort, please let us know.

Trees For Capitol Hill, Inc.  
647 South Carolina Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20003



## Trees For Capitol Hill



Who we are:

Trees for Capitol, Inc., a DC nonprofit corporation founded in 1991, is dedicated to enhancing our neighborhood by planting and caring for trees in public spaces. Our funding comes from generous grants from the Capitol Hill Community Foundation, the National Capital Bank and individual donors. We are a 501(c)(3) corporation.

To make a contribution, send a check made out to "Trees for Capitol Hill" to 647 South Carolina Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20003

- Officers:
- President: Beth Purcell (544-0178)
- Vice President/Treasurer: Margaret Missiaen (546-8681)  
(MargaretMissiaen@gmail.com)
- Secretary: Mark Grace
- Newsletter: Elizabeth Nelson
- Web address: [Treesforcapitolhill.org](http://Treesforcapitolhill.org)