

Tree Planting—at Twenty Years and Counting for Trees for Capitol Hill

Margaret Missiaen, Vice-President, TFCH

Trees for Capitol Hill, Inc. celebrated its 20th year by planting trees from one end of the Hill to the other. More than two dozen volunteers helped make our November 2011 planting a success by digging holes, back filling the soil around the trees and spreading mulch. They will also water during the next two or three summers until the trees are established. At the end of the day, 17 trees were settling in along Capitol Hill streets and parks. TFCH has added well over 1,000 trees to our neighborhood tree canopy thanks to hundreds of volunteers. We now see a new generation of arborists, such as Nick and David Heim, caring for our neighborhood trees.

Our volunteers have willingly participated in the City's program to diversify the types of street trees planted in the District. For more than a century, the Trees and Landscape Division and its successor, the Urban Forest Administration (UFA), were constrained by the designated tree species plan developed during the Boss Shepard era. After Dutch elm disease gradually decimated most of the mature trees on some of our major avenues, including North Carolina, South Carolina and most importantly, East Capitol Street, arborists urged diversification of street tree species. This is a welcome change in policy as it is a sensible "pre-emptive strike" against future large-scale tree loss, should a similar scourge attack another over-concentrated species. It also permits the delight and surprise of less familiar species with their own unique charms.

This season's planting list reflects this appreciation of diversity of trees in public space. A river birch in the triangle park at North Carolina Ave. and E Street, SE adds to the diversity of trees in public space. Three Carolina silverbells (*Halesia Carolina*) were planted by the Turner family near one of the House office building parking lots. UFA has planted a number of redbuds where small trees are appropriate. We selected a Forest Pansy redbud for Gabe Horchler to plant in front of his home on Independence. This tree produces thousands of tiny purple flowers in early spring, followed by burgundy foliage and, as an added benefit, is a native species. Our crew moved on to the 1700 block of Potomac Ave. where Nick Alberti had dug the hole for a memorial tree provided by the Capitol Hill Restoration Society in memory of Beth Purcell's mother. The 2.5" patriot elm was the largest tree on the truck and required all the skill of Tony Garcia of Merrifield Garden Center and his helper to set it upright in the center of the hole. This was the first of this type of disease resistant elm that we have planted. Beth had already delivered several containers of water to the site. She quickly zipped a Tregator in place and filled it with water. She will keep an eye on this tree near her home.

In the North Lincoln Park Neighborhood, Elizabeth Nelson again marshaled the community's resources to plant a wide variety of trees, including a Chinese pistache in the park at 15th and Constitution, a horse chestnut at 14th and A Streets NE, and two purple beeches on North Carolina Ave., NE.



Princeton elm on Potomac Ave SE



Seedless Sweetgum on 13th St NE