



Planting the future, one tree at a time

By BETSY PRICE • The News Journal • November 8, 2010

Wilmington's tree canopy outperformed the economy this year, growing by 10 percent, or 1,500 trees.

Even better, it's expected to rise by that much again in 2011.

Most of the new trees have been planted along streets and in urban areas in hope of creating a prettier city with cooler temperatures and better air to breathe, not to mention better control of water runoff and higher property values.

"We take trees for granted, but they actually have a lot of environmental benefits," said Pam Sapko, executive director of the Delaware Center for Horticulture. "It is something that we have to continue to invest in."

DCH is dedicated to promoting greener communities, and has been pushing to expand the number of trees planted by individuals, businesses, organizations and the government by providing expert advice, labor and even free trees.

While DCH welcomes requests for help, sometimes the organization doesn't wait to be asked.

Phil Weinberg was head of Congregation Beth Emeth's House and Ground Committee when Jen Bruhler, DCH's assistant director, approached the synagogue as it was finishing a renovation and asked about contributing trees.

DCH originally planned to plant 20 or 30 trees on the synagogue's property on Lee Boulevard near Washington Street, but ended up planting 60 last spring. They included six or more varieties, including sycamores, Weinberg said.

All but six are doing well, Weinberg said, and he suspects he only has to ask to get replacement trees for those that didn't make it.

"They really add to the appearance of the neighborhood," he said. "I've had comments from

neighbors who live across the street who say how much nicer it looks now."

The 1,500 trees planted in 2010 are the most planted in Wilmington since DCH began tracking tree planting a couple of decades ago, said Bruhler, head of DCH's urban forestry program. Most years, 500 to 700 trees were planted, she said.

While Wilmington now boasts 15,000 trees, its tree canopy covers only 12 percent of the city. Tree advocates recommend that cities along the Eastern Seaboard have 40 percent coverage, and Wilmington ranks lower than even New York City, which has 23 percent coverage.

The new trees help push DCH toward its goal of 20,000 trees by 2020.

Most of the new trees are seven to 12 feet tall. Most were bare-root trees, which DCH champions and sells each spring and fall. Because they don't have a root ball, they are cheaper, easier to handle and easier to plant and care for, Bruhler said.

About 10 percent of the plantings will fail, Bruhler said, and DCH will replant them.

DCH pays for its tree program and gets the trees planted through a web of sources, including donations, government support and grants. One big cash source is a \$349,000 grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus money, which is helping pay salaries and buy trees.

Many other groups have partnered with DCH in



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some form, including the Home Depot Foundation, Habitat for Humanity, the Riverfront Development Corp., the city of Wilmington, Cornerstone West/West End Neighborhood House, Kerns Bros. Tree Co., PNC Bank, the Delaware Nature Society, the Sierra Club and the Delaware League of Women Voters.

Many of the trees are planted by the five men in DCH's Return-to-Work program, which picks its members from prison work-release programs. Workers are chosen by DCH, the state departments of Labor and Correction and contractor John Kerns.

"It's a great way to provide green-jobs training, and increase employment opportunities and skills," Sapko said.

One graduate has gone on to a full-time job and is constantly winning praise from clients, she said.

Trees in plantings all along the Riverwalk on the Christina River in Wilmington came from DCH, said Megan McGlinchey, director of operations for the Riverfront Development Corp. The organization went to DCH when officials heard about its tree program.

"This is the first time we've partnered with DCH specifically for trees," McGlinchey said. "I think it really enhances the landscape along the Riverwalk. I think it further shows people that the Riverwalk is a nice place to be and to come and to spend some time."

The agency gives away trees, sends experts to help homeowners choose the right trees for their properties and helps organize mass plantings, like it did two weekends ago when 100 trees were planted on the Riverfront, and then again last week when 24 trees were planted at the Pavilion town homes and the St. Francis Hospital campus.

Both of those were part of DCH's efforts to observe the national NeighborWoods program, created by the Alliance for Community Trees. It tries to encourage planting trees in affordable housing. The housing can be public or private, rental or owner-owned.

DCH does not limit its work to Wilmington. It's planted trees in New Castle County and a few communities.

"We are working now to take the tree program statewide," Bruhler said. Officials already plan to plant in Seaford, Delaware City and New Castle

County next year.

"We do want to hear from people who have ideas," she said. "We might not be able to fund them, but we are actively seeking funding to be able to plant more trees statewide."

Contact Betsy Price at 324-2884 or beprice@delawareonline.com.

MORE INFO

Interested in planting a tree or getting a free tree? Call the Wilmington Tree Program at the Delaware Center for Horticulture at 658-6262, ext. 106.

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