

Sustainable Saratoga plans tree-planting event

By Vanessa Langdon/For The Daily Gazette April 23, 2016



The youngest volunteer helps plant a tree at last year's Tree Toga held as part of Sustainable Saratoga's Urban Forestry Project. The third annual event is set for Saturday, beginning at 9:30 a.m. (Photo courtesy of Dwight Pierre)

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Volunteers will plant trees throughout the city on Saturday as part of Sustainable Saratoga's Urban Forestry Project.

"Trees are important. Trees are being increasingly recognized nationwide and worldwide as providing benefits that far exceed their costs," said Tom Denny, chairman of Sustainable Saratoga's Urban Forestry Project.

This is the third year for the tree planting event, with about 30 trees planted in the each of the first two years.

"This year we are getting more ambitious: We're planting 50 trees," said Denny. "Twenty-five will be paid for by the [city's Department of Public Works] and the other 25 will be paid for by Sustainable Saratoga through donations and grants. We are very pleased to be doing that."

The trees were chosen from a list included in the city's urban forest master plan, developed in 2013. The plan approved about 25 large-growing species as appropriate for the city, and Tree Toga chose six of those. All are noninvasive, mostly native, or near native trees.

“As budgets go down, we’re trying to help the city through public-private effort to regain some of the large tree vision that we had in the past,” Denny said.

Diggers and hosts

The project attracts plenty of volunteers, Denny said. “The citizens are engaged. They are signaling that it’s important.”

The volunteers are both tree planters and tree hosts, who care for the trees once they’ve been planted.

“We feel because we’ve had the tree hosts involved we’ve had a very good survival rate,” Denny said. “It’s easy enough to get the trees planted but then you have to get them through the trauma of the first few years.”

The hosts can ask to have a tree planted by the street in front of their homes or another area within the city limits.

Jack Reber, a 17-year resident of Saratoga, has volunteered since the first Tree Toga event with his wife.

“It’s a lot of fun and it’s very gratifying,” he said of volunteering. “We go out and help with digging in the ground, which a lot of people enjoy. It’s nice to know that we’re planting trees for the future.”

Reber and his wife have volunteered both as planters and hosts. “It’s easy to host a tree because you just have to keep it watered,” he said.

Susan Shanley has planted trees for Tree Toga for the past two years and this year will be hosting a tree at her home for the very first time.

“My big thrill is to have kids plant trees and take care of trees and love trees,” Shanley said of the first year of Tree Toga when she planted at the Jefferson Terrace Apartments in Saratoga. “We had a big group of kids over there helping us.”

The program is an inspiration, said Shanley.

“They have created such an incredible foundation for this program so it’s just wonderful to see that this is just not going to stop,” she said. “Saratoga is becoming a city with more and more trees. Trees that will definitely be here in the next couple of hundred years.”

Those interested in volunteering — either as planters or hosts — should email trees@sustainablesaratoga.org with their name and which position they are interested in.

The planting on Saturday will run from 9:30 a.m. to about noon, and volunteers will meet at the Farmers Market pavilion in High Rock Park, Denny said.

“We typically mobilize somewhere close to 100 volunteer planters and we expect to have at least that many this year on April 30,” he said.

Tree planting experience is not required, and volunteers are encouraged to bring shovels or other planting tools to use and share.