



The Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign: *Offering Hope and Restoration for Tornado Victims*

*By Dale Dickens, Registered Forester, Urban Forestry Coordinator
and Cliff Hawkins, Urban Forestry Partnership Coordinator
Alabama Forestry Commission*

Many homeowners in North Alabama can now look out their windows or down their city lanes, and see small trees growing toward a much fairer leaf-adorned sky. However, they remember the darker days . . . the devastating winds and toppling trees. The Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign is a story of restoration and hope, of many volunteers and organizations working together to replace trees torn and destroyed by swirling winds.

In the months following April 2011, when dozens of tornados ripped across Alabama and surrounding states, the Alabama Forestry Commission joined forces with the Arbor Day Foundation to begin a multi-year, large-scale initiative to restore trees to the stricken North Alabama communities. Through this Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign, over 60



communities in 24 counties have received seedlings, information, and assistance in replanting their lost urban forest: trees which will not only provide shade and beauty, but also purify the air and water in these communities for years to come. Now in its third and final year of seedling distribution and planting, more than 85,000 native tree seedlings will be in the ground growing to replace those lost to the catastrophic winds of 2011.

The native wind-resistant tree species chosen for the give-aways included: flowering dogwood

(*Cornus florida*), northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*), Shumard oak (*Quercus shumardii*), blackgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), black willow (*Salix nigra*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), and eastern hophornbeam (*Carpinus carolinensis*). Crape myrtles (*Lagerstroemia* spp.) were also planted.

TREEmendous Support

A word of thanks goes to each and everyone involved in the Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign. The employees of the Alabama Forestry Commission and the members of The Arbor Day Foundation deserve praise for their work done in this worthy program. However, the number of trees delivered would not have been planted without the countless volunteers and homeowners who applied their own sweat equity. We also recognize the financial contributions from individuals, private foundations, and corporate sponsors across the nation and globe without which this campaign would not have been possible, including the Alabama Power Foundation, Apache Corporation, the Australia-based Cotton On Foundation, Daniel Foundation of Alabama, Davey Tree Expert Company, FedEx, NASCAR, and Protective Life Insurance.

Success Stories

The April 2011 tornado in Tuscaloosa was not the beginning of the loss of our urban forest in my neighborhood, Forest Lake, or the other neighborhoods along the storm path, Rosedale, Alberta, and Holt. But it was such a stark, devastating event that the people of Tuscaloosa and the state of Alabama were drawn to recognize what of nature we were losing in our daily environment.

The outpouring of volunteer energy following the storm needed to be matched by an outpouring of goods and ideas. One such match was certainly the Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign. In addition to local donations, the Tree Recovery Campaign helped provide the first signs of hope to our area.



The arrival of new trees into yards where houses were being rebuilt and onto lots where the future was, and even now may remain uncertain, brought back in dreams and hope.

Companied with that donation, a dedication to rebuilding and revitalizing Tuscaloosa continues today. The trees symbolize perfectly the progress we make as a society to create vast and wonderful improvements to our lives, a process which takes vision and work over time. I appreciate the resources the Tree Recovery Campaign and our local donors have provided to the process.

*Robert Kemp
Druid City Canopy Coalition (DC3)
Tuscaloosa*

Athens Limestone

When Lynne Hart, Executive Coordinator of Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful (KALB), was approached by Clifford Hawkins asking if KALB would be interested in organizing a tree seedling giveaway for Limestone County residents, she immediately agreed!

Limestone County's trees were ravaged by the April 2012 tornadoes, and this was a great way to help the residents reforest their county after those devastating storms.

KALB members had never organized a seedling give-away before, and they were a bit concerned about how to make it go smoothly. They would have over 5,000 seedlings of different varieties to give away. How would that many trees be handed out and how would the general public identify the trees they received?

Hart knew the KALB organization couldn't do it alone, so she recruited volunteers from two local Boy Scout Troops to help tag the trees with identifying codes. A seedling order form was created that included the codes for each tree. This order form was included in their monthly eNewsletter and on their website for two months prior to the giveaway. They advertised the event on local radio and television stations, in local newspapers, and through social media. It was a community effort to help find homes for these seedlings!



On the morning of the event, volunteers from across the community arrived to help. The trees were lined up and everyone was given instructions. The volunteers didn't have to wait for customers, because some people arrived an hour early!

Traffic control was very important! As people drove into the park, they were given an order form to complete if they didn't have one already (most did). Vehicles were organized into two lines flowing in and out of Big Spring Memorial Park. It was a very cold morning, so they did not ask anyone to get out of their vehicles. This also helped keep the line moving. KALB volunteers went to each vehicle, took their order forms, placed a large, brightly-colored number on the dashboard of the car, and went off to fill their order. Additional volunteers were stationed with the trees to help fill the orders. When the order was filled, the volunteer easily found the right vehicle by locating their number on the dashboard.

As the seedlings were given to their new owners, they were also provided written care and planting instructions so the seedlings would have the best chance for survival.

This very well-organized group gave away over 5,000 seedlings in three hours!

KALB received a great deal of feedback from city and county officials, as well as residents of Limestone County who benefited from the seedling giveaway. Everyone was so appreciative and grateful for the opportunity to add these trees to their community after such great loss. The people of Limestone County knew they had not been forgotten.

(Continued on page 22)

Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign

(Continued from page 21)

As mayor of the small town of Glen Allen, we the residents were very fortunate and honored to receive tree seedlings provided by the Alabama Forestry Commission for distribution. The April 27, 2011, tornado that crossed through our town limits destroyed numerous trees as well as homes, which of course fractured many lives.



Once it became known that your Commission was going to be giving away tree seedlings, I worked intensively spreading the word. We issued press releases to our local newspapers stating that the

Forestry Commission would be giving away the seedlings at no cost in an attempt to help refurbish areas which had been destroyed by the significant storm. Those residents who were affected received the allotted amount of tree seedlings and were very appreciative of the Forestry Commission for providing the free seedlings. I have spoken with several of those who received the seedlings and I'm happy to report that the residents are still grateful for the program provided by the Forestry Commission. Although some of the seedlings didn't make it due to weather and other obstacles, most seemed to survive and are growing as time allows.

We had a great turnout at the seedling give-away and ended up running out of seedlings quickly. Residents showed up at the give-away site well in advance, and the line formed in long lengths across the parking lot. Thanks to the assistance of the students from the Future Farmers of America, Hubbertville School Chapter, the event was well organized and well received by the public. The only complaint received was the fact that several residents who showed up to get seedlings were disappointed that they were limited to the number of seedlings allowed, and that the dogwood seedlings had run out prior to their opportunity in the receiving line.

My view of the event overall was that we had an overwhelming turn-out. As you are aware, we even had residents who showed up at the end of the give-away, who left without any seedlings because we had given them all away. Once again, I have nothing but praise for your assistance with this project and for the great benefit provided to our residents by the Alabama Forestry Commission following the tragic loss of the 2011 Alabama tornadoes.

*Respectfully,
Allen J. Dunavant
Mayor, Town of Glen Allen*

I wanted to thank you for your help and assistance these past three years with the Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign (ATRC). The ATRC played an important role in assisting Jefferson County communities impacted by the 2011 and 2012 tornado outbreaks. Several communities suffered extensive loss of trees and vegetative cover, leaving the landscape featureless and the communities vulnerable to the associated impacts of storm-water runoff. The ATRC offered citizens a FREE way to help restore the benefits that such vegetation brings, including reducing storm-water runoff, capturing and filtering pollutants, increasing storm-water infiltration, and reducing soil erosion.

Citizens who participated in the ATRC had a reason to participate and most all of them had a story to tell. Some stories were practical, some economical, and some emotional. Citizens were so thankful to have the opportunity to help replant their landscape – to add back various elements that were taken away and with no charge.



It was remarkable to hear the many associations that people had with their trees. They would come and say how they miss the shade their tree gave during the summer, and how much hotter their homes are and how much more expensive it is for them to run the air conditioner. How they were amazed the skies were so much brighter at night because the city lights that the trees must have blocked were now gone. How they missed the birds and wildlife that used to come to their yard, but they haven't seen after the storms. They would say they were surprised at how much more water runs off their property and practically floods their streets and driveways, and that they were astonished at how fast the rain water flows and washes away areas of their yard and driveway. It was amazing to hear the many memories people had associated with their trees and their emotional ties to those trees: kids playing and climbing on them, feeders and art hanging from them, photos of families (generations, even) that were taken underneath them.

I certainly hope this Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign will continue on past 2014, expanding its reach to more communities in Alabama.

*Warmly,
Hana Burwinkle
Education Training Coordinator, Jefferson County Storm
Water Management Department
Birmingham*

Pleasant Grove

On April 27, 2011, lives and landscape in the City of Pleasant Grove, Alabama, were deeply affected by the F-4 tornado within a matter of minutes. The storm killed eleven people, completely destroyed 358 homes, and left many homes needing repairs.

With help from the Forestry Commission, Arbor Day



Foundation, and our local Boy Scout Troop 120, a total of 3,300 trees was given to those that were affected by the tornado. Troop 120 picked up the trees and set up a point location across from Hill's

Grocery for two weekends. The first weekend they gave out seedlings and helped plant trees for those that needed assistance. They then gave away trees at the same location the following weekend. There were enough trees left over after giving to Pleasant Grove residents, so the troop went to the community of Concord and gave away the remaining trees.

This is a small step in getting back some trees that were lost in the tornado. It was sad to see such a loss of trees. The city has a total of 250 vacant lots; some have what is left of trees that were heavily damaged and is a reminder of the devastation that came through the city. The city council is presently working on a plan to get right-of-entry and permission to cut and drop the trees that cannot grow back and be healthy.

We are very appreciative of the trees given to the property owners and we acknowledge it will be a long time before we can see a considerable growth with the seedlings, but it is a step in the right direction of rebuilding and replacing trees that were lost. We have to keep the faith and work towards restoration one step at a time.

*Karen Duncan
City Clerk, City of Pleasant Grove*

Birmingham

The donation of trees from the Alabama Forestry Commission to the Keep Birmingham Beautiful Commission has assisted in the ongoing effort to keep Birmingham a Tree City. A total of 1,200 seedlings were distributed to school children, residential and business communities, churches, and the general public during the Arbor Week Celebration that included the 22nd Annual Plant Dig.

Held at the New Georgia Landfill, the Plant Dig annually allows 150 to 500 individuals to harvest local trees and plants in a natural setting. There were 25 volunteers available at the Plant Dig to assist individuals in loading the trees, plants, and seedlings.

Providing "free" trees is a way of encouraging people to plant. The trees are making an observable impact on Birmingham's residential, commercial, and business landscapes, adding value, shade, and beautification.



Trees for the Future

While the cleanup and rebuilding in these communities will continue for years to come, there is still an opportunity to support the Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign and help in the healing process by making an online donation at www.arborday.org/Alabama. For every dollar in donations, a 2-4 foot seedling will be added to those already planted.🌱

Editor's Note: The 85,000 tree seedlings distributed through the Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign were in addition to the 275,000 trees given out across the state by the Alabama Forestry Commission in those three years through normal seedling give-aways.