

Neighborhood Tree Steward

Stories of Citizen Volunteers in Portland Neighborhoods



Arbor Lodge

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Neighborhood Tree Planting North Omaha Park Blocks

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Back in September 2009, some city crews came through and chopped down our elm trees in front of our house because they were infested with Dutch Elm Disease. These elm trees had been planted in the 1950s, and provided a spectacular canopy in front of our modest homes in Arbor Lodge. The elms were one of the reasons we were attracted to buying our home, so when they were gone, a great gaping hole in our world was created that, frankly, made us want to cry.

But soon we were not alone. Within a week several neighbors, many of whom we did not know before this

incident (although we've lived in the neighborhood for 13 years!), sent a flyer around the block wanting to organize and do something about losing our trees. We heard that the City wasn't going to replant. We offered to have the meeting in our home and we were surprised by how many neighbors showed up (about 30!) to talk about the trees. After many contacts with different City departments, we learned about the neighborhood tree stewardship program and my husband David Taylor and I signed up to learn about the urban forestry plan.

Through the tree stewardship program we met Karl Dawson and he agreed to help us replant the trees in our neighborhood. The City gave us the choice about what types of trees to plant, from a list that they generated, and we held a sort of straw vote on

the block. Karl told us when to plant the trees, while David and I organized our neighbors to help plant them. The neighbors have agreed to water the trees for the first few years during the dry season so they will grow strong and tall.

From what started out as a heartbreak has ended up being a great way to meet our neighbors. We learned that we have some fabulous, dedicated neighbors who are deeply committed to our environment and have a great respect for the aesthetics of our neighborhood.

If there's anything that I would have done differently, we would have planted the slower growing oak trees in the middle of the block, and planted the faster growing Accolade elms closer to Rosa Parks Way – a busy, noisy street. But, ah well, in a few years it won't matter as much.

We have to continue caring for these trees, making sure that they get watered through the long, dry summers on Omaha Avenue. In a few years we can hold a session about pruning and use these trees as examples of good pruning practices.

David and I also look at our neighborhood much differently than we used to. We always liked the trees, but now we notice the Heritage Trees, the lovely "big" trees, the maples and walnuts, as well as the badly pruned trees, the diseased birches, and some uncared-for hawthorns that become a mess so easily. We notice it all! We want to help our neighbors with their troublesome trees and encourage the others to be good stewards of their trees. We love our canopy and we want to make sure it grows and flourishes for as long as we're here to help.



Arbor Lodge neighbors lend a helping hand