

TREE TRUST OFFERS ARBORISTS OPPORTUNITY TO PRESERVE LEGACY TREES

By Ian Bruce – ISA Certified Arborist ON-0101A and Toni Ellis – ED Tree Trust

Driving home to Elora from Toronto five years ago, I came upon four ancient Sugar Maples, local landmarks that had been felled. My heart dropped. It was shocking. How could this happen?

Like so many legacy trees, they had survived 1954's Hurricane Hazel, turbulent and increasingly frequent windstorms, droughts, bitter winters – everything Mother Nature threw at them. While they bore all the hallmarks of old age, I thought: Don't they deserve better? At the very least, a second opinion from an experienced arborist who knows all about conserving trees. I was not alone in my horror and disbelief. Everyone who saw the site felt just the same.

I turned my anger into action. I sit on the board of the Elora Environment Centre, a registered Canadian charity with a 30-year track record for pilot-testing grassroots action. It was easy to convince my colleagues that we should do something to preserve beloved, veteran trees. So, we started Tree Trust, which got some invaluable and instant cred, thanks to support from a pair of local professionals – Pearl Street Communications and Lind Design.

How does Tree Trust work?

It's fairly simple. We invest charitable donations to hire qualified arborists to assess candidate trees and recommend what they see as necessary to extend the life of those trees. Each arborist's report is accompanied by a quote for the work that is reviewed by

Tree Trust's in-house senior arborist. If approved, the arborist who made the recommendation is authorized to proceed.

Our website includes a simple carbon calculator for travelers who choose to offset the carbon footprint of their journeys with a donation to Tree Trust. Others give to Tree Trust simply because they love trees and appreciate all they have to offer our communities and the environment. Either way, donations are used locally, where donors can see their gifts at work.

Saving big trees and planting trees play complementary roles in the fight against climate change. But the legacy trees do the heavy lifting. As long as it remains healthy and structurally sound, one big tree does the work of almost 280 saplings.

Growth

Since 2019, Tree Trust has been growing. It now consists of seven chapters – Waterloo Region, Centre Wellington, Stratford-Perth, Meaford, Town of the Blue Mountains, Guelph and the Toronto Island Community, collectively serving a population of over 700,000. Each chapter identifies candidate Tree Trust trees, manages their own public relations and raises funds locally. A key selling point is that funds are invested in preserving local trees that donors can visit and admire.

Endorsements from arborists

Each chapter has a Tree Trust-Approved

Arborist, with the conservation arboriculture skills needed to work on valuable legacy trees. They are vocal advocates. "Tree Trust is one of a kind," says Phil Guenter of Baum Tree Care in Centre Wellington. "Working on trees that would normally never get the true care they deserve is amazing."

In the Town of Blue Mountains and Meaford, Tobias Effinger of Arboreal Tree Care is equally enthusiastic. "Having started a conservation-based arboriculture firm specializing in the care of mature trees and forest fragments, it was a natural fit to work alongside Tree Trust. That the conservation of trees not only benefits neighbourhoods – be they human, soil biome, or arboreal specialists – but also locks in carbon. Having the opportunity to meet and discuss the advancement of tree care with like-minded arborists from other chapters of Tree Trust is immensely rewarding and inspiring."

Tree Trust arborists qualify by submitting a sample prescription for treating a legacy tree that is vetted by Ian Bruce, the program's technical advisor. Ian is well known for his decades of teaching, climbing and pioneering work in the industry.

Since the mid-1990s, the science and technology that support modern methods, standards and practices in tree care have advanced dramatically. So, the preservation of legacy trees in our growing and changing urban environments warrants a hard reset.

We must focus on the vital role of such trees and the unique and complex care requirements that support their best possible health, structural integrity, and longevity.

To stay current, share experiences and strengthen the Tree Trust Arborist community, we host an annual summer workshop. In July 2023, Eloquip Ltd. is sponsoring a new workshop for arborists less familiar with conservation techniques: Managing Legacy Trees for Preservation, not Firewood. Participant certified arborists will receive seven CEUs from the ISA.

One of a kind

Tree Trust is the only charity dedicated to preserving Ontario's mature trees. As of Spring 2023, Tree Trust has treated more than 50 trees. Chapters are using Tree Trust program as an on-ramp to more urban forest action such as Tree Festivals, a tree nursery with a focus on growing saplings from seeds collected from Tree Trust trees, municipal advocacy and community-wide tree planting. In the face of alarming climate change news, Tree Trust is a good news story: "There IS something I can do - help preserve our big trees."

Tree Trust runs on the generous donation of time and talent of chapter volunteers. Our bare-bones overhead and donations complete the picture. If you have clients who love trees, please share our story. We are happy to set up calls or visits with anyone who might be interested in supporting us. To find out how you can get involved or start a chapter in your community, please contact manager@treetrust.ca.

TOP: Baum Tree Care at work in a silver Maple in Aboyne, Ontario CENTRE: Several firms at work on a sprawling silver Maple in Salem BOTTOM: Most chapters stage an annual high-profile event to celebrate the care of Tree Trust trees. Here, Tim's Tree Care tends to Stratford's first Tree Trust tree at the Falstaff Family Centre.

