

*Meaford, ON, September 25, 2023.....*One tree has stood out from among a half dozen trees that were nominated for the Meaford Tree Trust inaugural designation of Tree-of-the-Year, a lone super tall sycamore tree that towers over the monument to Beautiful Joe in Meaford's Beautiful Joe Park.

The tree's origin is a mystery. Its location this far north is surprising. The fact that it is thriving and that Tree Trust has chosen it as its Tree-of-the-Year is "auspicious", according to Tree Trust arborist Tobias Efflinger. "Not only is it a grand tree but choosing this sycamore is timely," he said. "Sycamores are Carolinian. The Carolinian trees are moving north, south, east and west - the change is not linear. The fact that we have a Carolinian species here suggests that we have good genetic soils and they will survive here."

Tree Trust is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to preserve the biggest and best urban trees. The organization raises funds to hire arborists who keep the trees healthy and extend their lifespans through measures such as pruning, fertilizing and insect control.

Coordinator Pete Russell has come to recognize the special connection that many individuals have to particular trees. "When talking to people about big old trees, often their faces will light up as they tell me about a special tree that they love," he says.

"Legacy trees are key players in the fight against climate change. They are the carbon sequestering giants in the battle against climate change. Grey County is blessed with an assortment of legacy trees, some less notable than others, some in more or less healthy condition, yet so many of which loom tall in the hearts of those who have a personal connection to them. Meaford Tree Trust set out in June to designate one such tree as the 2023 Tree-of-the-Year.

"The program was sponsored by Echo Foundation. We received six nominations, all of them certainly worthy, each with its own appeal. The nominations included a rare specimen of a sycamore tree, a spirited 'laydown' tree, a giant cottonwood tucked away on a side trail, a pine tree that conjured up a fantasy world, a statuesque willow, and a beech tree that glows in the late afternoon sun.

"Choosing one over the others was not an easy task."

The nominees were:

Pine Tree: St Vincent Hwy 26 intersection: This pine tree stands in a cluster of pine trees that could date back a century or more. The tree's branches sweep upward seemingly to cradle woodland creatures, real or imaginary, and offer them sanctuary at this busy intersection.

'Laydown' ash: Peggy's House: Property owner Peggy McIntosh speaks of a spiritual connection to this 'laydown' ash tree on her property on the escarpment. The tree seems to have twisted and turned to face the bay. Rather than reaching upward, the tree trunk grew parallel to the ground, twisting and turning, till it faced the Georgian Bay, then extended upward, like a beacon.

Gargantuan cottonwood: 22 feet in circumference: Cottonwoods are known to grow to be big trees but this one is a puzzlement. Why did this cottonwood remain standing when other trees in the area were felled? Could there have been a farm yard nearby, and the tree valued for its shade? This cottonwood is worth taking a short hike along one of the Bruce Trail side trails on the Bayview Escarpment Provincial Nature Reserve. Approximately one kilometre north of the junction of Sideroad 22 and the 11th Line, you will see, on the right, a blue sign that aptly reads Cottonwood Trail. Half to three quarters of kilometre in, look toward the southeast and you will notice the crown of the cottonwood looming over the other trees.

Beech tree: Lakeview Cemetery: Slick bark, sprawling branches, and translucent leaves - this beech tree is a treasure to photograph in all seasons. The beech tree is precariously located next to the cemetery office at the edge of the pond. So far, it has stood fast despite the weight of its sprawling branches.

Willow: Grand, graceful: The Olivet Baptist Church is home to a grand and graceful-looking willow that claims a large portion of the property bordering on Ivan and Augusta Streets. Willow trees are not easy to maintain, but this one has been lovingly manicured over the years.

And the winner is....the Beautiful Joe sycamore: This sycamore stands tall beside the pavilion in Beautiful Joe Park. Look for the very tall, slender, whitish trunk.

For more information contact Pete Russell at meaford@treetrust.ca.

Cutlines: Meaford Tree Trust officially declared a rare sycamore tree located in the Beautiful Joe Park the 2023 Tree-of-the-Year on September 19. Above: Meaford Tree Trust Coordinator Pete Russell, Beautiful Joe Heritage Society Co-chair Sharon Mansion, Tree Trust arborist Tobias Efflinger, Mayor Ross Kentner, and Beautiful Joe Heritage Society Chair Lynda Stephens.