Going Green

Communities throughout Illinois celebrate an American tradition dating to 1887: Arbor Day.

Story By Reinee Hildebrandt and Kathy Andrews

Arbor Day is Julius Sterling Morton's most recognized accomplishment and legacy.

Born in Michigan in 1832, the Nebraska journalist and politician knew the value of trees. The winds were fierce at his Nebraska home, and he knew trees would redirect and slow the Grand Prairie winds. When he served as President Grover Cleveland's Secretary of Agriculture, Morton worked to improve agricultural techniques throughout the United States. On April 10, 1872 Morton held the first Arbor Day in Nebraska, a day when more than 1 million trees were planted.

Morton's idea of an Arbor Day swept the nation.

Illinois' first Arbor Day was held in 1887, but not until 1949 did the state legislature legally declare the last Friday in April as "Arbor and Bird Day." The purpose of the legislation was to plant trees, shrubs and vines about homes, along the highways and on public grounds to show the value of trees and birds and the necessity of their protection, thus contributing to the comforts and attractions of our state.

Included in the founding premise of Arbor and Bird Day is the need to conduct appropriate exercises in public schools and elsewhere, involving the citizens of Illinois in this important practice. School children in the Village of Mount Prospect participate in an annual tree-planting ceremony, and anxiously await hearing Mayor Irvana K. Wilks recite the poem that she penned to commemorate the event.

'Greenspire' Littleleaf Linden
(*Tilia cordata* 'Greenspire')
By Irvana K. Wilks

In the time-honored tradition
marking Arbor Day
we plant a tree, a 'Greenspire'
Littleleaf Linden,
covering its roots with rich, brown
Illinois soil.

Additional Information

History of Arbor Day www.arborday.net

National Arbor Day Foundation (list of state Arbor Day events, Right Tree Right Place, list of Illinois TREE CITY USA Communities) www.arborday.org

Ten Things You Can Do on Arbor Day, 10 Things Teachers Can Do on Arbor Day and a variety of activity pages www.idahoforests.org/arborday

Morton Arboretum's Celebrate Arbor Day in Your Community and Tree Planting Guide www.mortonarb.org

Village of Mount Prospect's mayor, Irvana K. Wilks, commemorates each Arbor Day planting ceremony with a newly penned poem.

Our words of dedication echo across
a nation
and join with the choruses of millions
of others
honoring this same April day.

One imagines that this sapling stands
like a small sentry—
a guard—next to this school built by
faith. It is, however,
we who are the sentries, promising to
care and to protect it.

The sun and rain will nourish this
linden.
As it grows, stretching its branches
into the vast sky,
it will shade children who pass
beneath laughing,
learning—generations of students
we've not met.

In summer, the perfume of its
flowers—delicate white clusters—
will beckon to us. We will pause
within the canopy of the fragrance
and for an instant pretend to be on
a tropical island.

And so it will be, the life of this linden
and our lives
locked together—grownups, youth
and the tree, because
today we take shovels and cover its
roots with rich, brown Illinois soil.

And then we make a promise.

Be a part of the green scene, join your community and plant a tree on Arbor Day.

2009 Illinois Arbor and Bird Day Events

Here are some of the Arbor and Bird Day events taking place this year. All Illinois Tree City USA communities have an Arbor Day tree planting event. Contact your local municipal representatives for further details.

April 17, Friday
Centralia—Fairview Park
April 18, Saturday
Oswego—Earth/Arbor Day and Recycling Extravaganza, Public Works Facility
Week of April 20
Scott Air Force Base—TBA
Hazel Crest—five schools and on the 25th at Openlands, 17120 Holmes Ave.
April 20, Monday
O'Fallon—LaVerna Evans Grade School
April 23, Saturday
Orland Park—Century Junior High, 10801 W. 159th St.; Meadow Ridge, 10959 W. 159th St.; Centennial School, 14101 Creek Crossing Dr.
April 24, Friday – State of Illinois designated Arbor/Bird Day
Arlington Heights—Greenbrier Park
Barrington—various grade schools
Bloomington—Trinity Lutheran School
Bolingbrook—TBA
Buffalo—TBA
Champaign—10 a.m., West Side Park, 400 W. University Ave.
Des Plaines—TBA
DuQuoin—TBA
Highland Park—9 a.m., Heller Nature Center, 2821 Ridge Road. Limited space. Call in advance at (847) 926-1149.
Hinsdale—TBA
Hoffman Estates—10:30 a.m., Arbor Day Park, intersection of Downing Drive and Sumac Trail
Glencoe—Glencoe Central School
Lanark—TBA
Lisle—TBA
Marquette Heights—TBA
Mount Carroll—TBA
Northfield—TBA
Oak Lawn—TBA, 1 p.m.
Orland Park—St. Michael School, 14355 Highland Ave.; High Point School, 14825 West Ave.; Jerling Junior High, 8851 W. 151st St.
Palos Hills—Town Square Park, 8455 103rd St.
Prospect Heights—TBA
Wilmette—program with one elementary school; Arbor Day/Memorial Day service for 50 year city employee and fire chief
April 25, Saturday
Antioch–9 a.m.-noon at the Wm. E. Brook Entertainment Center, Skidmore Dr.
Bloomingdale—10 a.m., Public Works Facility
Elburn—TBA
Evanston—1-4 p.m. Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd.
Mt. Vernon—10 a.m.-1 p.m., Veterans Park, 800 South 27th St.
Naperville—8 a.m.-noon, Arbor Day Tree Sale, New Public Works Facility, 180 Fort Hill
North Barrington—Oak tree planting at 9:30 a.m., North Barrington Village Hall (111 Old Barrington Rd.) to celebrate the village's 50th anniversary, followed by a program on using native plants in residential landscaping.
Northbrook—8:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Arbor Day-Earth Day celebration, Village Green Park
St. Charles—4 p.m., Lincoln Park, Route 64 and N. 4th St.
April 26, Sunday
Moweaqua—2 p.m., Central A & M High School
May 2, Saturday
Hickory Hills – City Hall, 8652 W. 95th St.
June 7, Sunday
Alton–6 p.m., Gordon F. Moore Community Park, Nan Elliot Memorial Rose Garden, 4550 College Ave.

Other municipalities celebrating Arbor Day
Lake Barrington—TBA, recognition of Arbor Day as one of the 50th anniversary events
Mackinaw—TBA, Veterans Park

Going Green

Why Plant a Tree?

- One hundred trees can remove 37 tons of carbon dioxide per year and 248 pounds of other air pollutants per year.
- Research has shown that tree-filled neighborhoods have lower domestic violence and are safer and more sociable.
- Trees save us money. With properly placed trees around our houses, we can save up to 20 percent on annual air-conditioning and 2-20 percent on winter heating.
- Trees add value to your property. Each properly maintained tree in a front yard adds 1 percent to a house sales price and may even be the reason why someone wanted to purchase the house. Large specimen trees can add 10 percent to property value.

The Village of Northfield traditionally celebrates Arbor Day with the 5th grade students from District 29 in Northfield.

Hug a Tree

The Mt. Vernon Parks and Recreation Department believes in a hands-on approach when it comes to Arbor Day education and activities.

"Hug A Tree Day" in 2008 featured a collaborative effort between high school classes and the University of Illinois Master Gardeners. The combined team helped more than 700 elementary students at one school get their hands dirty as they investigated roots, counted tree rings and smelled the sap oozing from tree limbs.

George Bryant, Mt. Vernon Parks and Public Facilities Director, said, "One major goal of this event was to create a unique learning environment by having the high school students teach the elementary students." The enthusiasm that was generated by both groups was contagious as teachers applauded their return in 2009.

What child doesn't love to climb trees? Mt. Vernon Parks and Recreation Department combined that desire with safety measures and held its first tree climbing activity for children at the Annual Arbor Day Celebration. A detailed plan was developed that utilized children's climbing saddles, ropes and hardware. A local utility tree trimming contactor's staff supervised the climbing stations after the city's insurance carrier approved the program.

"The Mt. Vernon community loves for the Parks and Recreation Department to push the mark on creating high-energy family programs," said Bryant. "The children's tree climbing activity started a change in direction for the department and has resulted in the creation of new outdoor programs titled the Family Adventure Series."

Arbor Day activities in Mt. Vernon include a tree-climbing program organized by the Parks and Recreation Department.

The Village of Elburn is one of many Illinois communities participating in Arbor Day tree-planting celebrations.