More than 175 Illinois communities have earned recognition for their forestry programs, and Urbana is a leading example.

Tree City USA Celebrates 30 Years of Program Excellence

Story By Reinee Hildebrandt

Tree City USA is 30 years old. Initiated in 1976 by the National Arbor Day Foundation in response to the need for local community forestry programs, the Illinois Tree City USA program has evolved from a city beautification and recognition program to one deeply rooted in science and safety issues.

The people of Illinois want trees as a part of their environment and many communities have stepped up and responded to citizen needs by implementing tree protection and forest preservation ordinances. Administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Urban and Community Forestry program, since the mid 1990s the Illinois Tree City USA program has moved up to No. 2 in the nation for the number of communities involved, a ranking held for more than 10 years.

With 30 Tree City USA designations, Urbana is the leading Illinois tree community. Under the leadership of former City Arborist Bruno Schielzeth, with tree planning and replacement guided by Bill Kruidenier, Urbana entered the Tree City USA program in its inaugural year.

Urbana's early mission was to remove and replace soft maples, Siberian elm and other weak-wooded trees. Established were a 50/50 cost-share tree planting program between homeowners and the city, and a tree care ordinance—a model modified over time but remaining an example for other communities.

Following on the heels of these initiatives were a community tree inventory, followed by an annual maintenance program based on the findings of that program.

Two major disasters in Urbana—an ice storm and a severe drought—created opportu-

For more information on Tree City USA, visit www.dnr.state.il.us/conservation/forestry/Urban/treecity.htm or www.arborday.org/programs/treecityusa.cfm.

Sandy Clark, Mt. Prospect Forestry/Grounds Division

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Patty Vlazny, Village of Orland Park

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Sandy Clark, Mt. Prospect Forestry/Grounds Division

Sue Midday, Village of Northfield

Mary T. McClelland, McHenry County Nursery

Tracy Geils, Village of Glendale Heights

Sandy Clark, Mt. Prospect Forestry/Grounds Division

Background photo by Sue Midday, Village of Northfield

Communities participating in the Tree City USA program benefit by creating a public image that helps attract residents, businesses, conferences and meetings. Tree City USA is sponsored by the National Arbor Day Foundation, in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters.

nities for the city to set up a scheduled pruning cycle and increase the number of trees pruned from 500 a year to 2,000—with no increase in tax dollars. Additionally, citizen requests declined because the urban forest was being better maintained. Urbana also created Illinois' first landscaped median interstate interchange at the I-74 Lincoln Avenue exchange.

Urbana also has actively participated in the TREE CITY USA GROWTH program, an award given to communities showing a commitment beyond the basic solid foundations of the Tree City USA program.

In comparing the costs associated with the natural disasters Urbana experienced in the early 1990s with daily operating costs, overtime costs associated with cleaning up limbs broken during straight-line winds, micro-bursts and ice storms is much more expensive than the cost of daily operation.

According to Mike Brunk, current city arborist: "The longer Urbana maintains the cyclical tree-pruning program, the less it costs the city in reactionary maintenance."

Congratulations to Urbana for being in the elite group of communities nationwide to receive the 30-year Tree City USA designation.

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Tree City USA has four community-based standards that communities must meet to qualify for the annual recognition.

1. A tree board or city department must be authorized and responsible for tree care;
2. Passage of a tree-care ordinance that identifies who has tree authority and the tree standards to be implemented;
3. A community forestry annual budget of at least $2 per capita; and,
4. An Arbor Day Celebration where the Mayor or equivalent signs a proclamation declaring Arbor Day.