



# Tree Tribute Newsletter



## Hope, Resilience, and Serinity: 30 Years Later

Many Oklahomans remember or have learned about the devastating events of April 19, 1995 when 168 people died in the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building bombing. In the aftermath, along with survivors and those forever changed, stood a symbol of hope: an American Elm (*U. americana*) that withstood the blast and became known as the Survivor Tree. Saplings of the original tree have since been shared across the country and around the world, including one planted in our campus forest on the bombings fifth anniversary. In honor of the 30th anniversary, OSU Facilities Management Landscape Services and the Student chapter of the Society of American Foresters hosted a rededication ceremony for our Survivor Tree. University Arborist, Caitlin Gipson planned and lead the event. OSU Air Force Cadet 4th Class Devin Deluna led the Color Guard, and students Sydney Hagar, Chair OSU Student Chapter Society of American Foresters, and Karter Caves Student Government Association Director of Sustainability, served as speakers. Also in attendance were Mark Bays, retired Oklahoma Urban Forestry Coordinator who cared for the original Survivor Tree for much of his career, and Oklahoma

Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur who lost her mother in the bombing.

Above: Mr. Bays and Sec. Arthur sprinkle wood chip mulch from the original Survivor Tree around the base of the Campus Survivor Tree.

Watch a [recording of the ceremony](#), or learn more about the [original dedication ceremony](#). Matthew Hunter, a student in the School of Media & Strategic Communication wrote a thoughtful summary of the rededication, [OSU honors resilience, community at Survivor Tree Rededication](#).



## Campus Trees at a Glance

Number of Trees: 4,136

Number of Species: 401

Structural Value: \$15.7 million

Percent Canopy Cover: 7.62%

Trees Planted: 63

Trees Removed: 38

Trees Pruned: 800+

Oxygen Production: 189 tons/yr

Carbon Storage: 2.386 thousand tons (\$1.03 million)

Carbon Sequestration: 70.88 tons (\$30.7 thousand/yr)

Avoided Run off: 717.9 thousand gal/yr (\$6.42 thousand/yr)

Accurate to 11/17/2025



Most Populus Species	% Population
Crape Myrtle spp.	9.9
Holly spp.	8.1
Shumard Oak	7.0
Bald Cypress spp.	6.7
Eastern Red Cedar	5.2
Chinese Pistache	4.5
Southern Magnolia	4.5
Bur Oak	4.3
Lacebark Elm	3.9
Eastern Redbud	2.1



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## Special points of interest

- Get Campus Arboretum Data Updates
- Meet Members of Your Tree Leadership Board
- Missed An Arboretum Event? You're in Luck! Follow Links!
- Learn How Students Interact With Our Campus Forest



## Gunderson Shumard Oak: A difficult loss

Pictured left: Mature Shumard Oak, lost to structural issues. DBH 40", Height 44'.

Healthy does not always mean structurally sound or safe, and tree provides an unfortunate but clear example. At initial inspection, this mature Shumard Oak (*Quercus shumardii*) appeared healthy and vigorous, with a nearly 80-foot, dense canopy spread and strong branch attachment—despite some interesting branching angles and aspect ratios. However, after weeks of close monitoring the tree was found to be increasing at an unacceptable rate. Essentially, the tree was falling on its own at such a speed that could not be mediated. All options for preservation were considered, including installing a permanent fence around the drip line. Still, community safety must come first. Anyone familiar with OSU Football traditions knows that this area is highly trafficked during tailgating season. Because the tree's failure was inevitable, the risk to community had to be prevented—and removal was the only viable option. This decision was not made lightly: A team of six highly qualified International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborists assessed the tree and came to the same conclusion. Given the high-profile area and community's love for this tree, extensive educational outreach accompanied this project: An A-frame sign was placed on site for months to inform tailgaters and the wider OSU community, and OETA and Oklahoma Gardening also aired a segment on the decision and removal, which can be viewed [here](#).

One theory behind the tree's premature failure is that decades ago, during sidewalk construction between the tree and the Gunderson Hall, roots may have been severed—compromising the tree's anchoring root system. This highlights the importance of tree protection measures in construction projects. If campus planners had better protected this tree decades ago, it may have stood healthy and strong for many more decades.

*"OSU Landscape Services grieves the loss of this tree with you. Our Cowboy Family adored this tree for over a century. It provided shade, beauty, and unmeasurable ecological benefits to our park-like lawn setting and greater Campus Arboretum.*

*-Caitlin Gipson, University Arborist*

### Campus Tree Tours Return

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, much of the world shut down, including OSU FMLS. Our department was well-known for hosting a variety of landscape tours, but those were paused completely with COVID protocols. Now, as the world continues to heal, OSU FMLS is excited to offer tours again. The new 'Culturally Significant Trees' tour began as an evening lab for an Honors College class, but has expanded to other audiences. If you would like to walk campus with the University Arborist and learn about culturally significant trees, please reach out and schedule with [caitlin.gipson@okstate.edu](mailto:caitlin.gipson@okstate.edu). Groups of 10-20 are preferred, but other arrangements can be accommodated. Also, be on the lookout for information about an Autumn Color Tree Tour in the fall of 2026!

## Campus Tree Report, 2025

*This year, 63 trees were planted, representing 25 species across 15 genera, and finding homes at 22 sites across campus.*

**38 Trees Removed:** 27, natural decline. 3, disease/pest. 3, wind. 3, aesthetics. 1, utilities. 1 Gunderson Oak. One Zelkova (*Z. serrata*) was lost to fungus, one American Elm (*U. americana*) to Dutch Elm Disease, and one Honey Locust (*G. triacanthos*) to borers. The three removed for aesthetic reasons were Crape Myrtles (*Lagerstroemia spp.*) and of little concern for the overall tree canopy; permanent topiaries occupy their place at the Alumni Center. One mature Bur Oak (*Q. macrocarpa*) near the USDA building was lost when a steam tunnel leak 'cooked' the root system of the tree, causing rapid decline.

**Canopy Cover:** According to iTree reports, our canopy coverage is 56.83 acres. With total campus acreage, minus buildings and athletics, at 739.63 acres, about 7.62% of our campus is covered by tree canopy.

**Goals:** The primary goal for our Campus Forest this year was to prune as many trees as possible. In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in canopy management: Instead of allowing trees to grow fully to the ground where ever possible, we are now raising canopies to improve campus safety. Branches over sidewalks should be cleared to at least 8 feet and branches over parking lots and roadways to 15 feet, with special attention given to street signs and light poles to increase nighttime visibility. Trees in open spaces are pruned to improve line of sight across campus and allow our grounds crew to mow under the trees without hitting branches. However, natural history of each species is being considered and trees are being left full to the ground in some situations. For example, evergreens should never be pruned up and some trees, like upright Sweetums and Oaks are meant to have branches starting low on the trunk. About 75% of campus has been pruned according to these guidelines, and work will continue until all of campus has been addressed. Please keep in mind, there is only one full time employee dedicated to tree care, this process will take time. A complete list of goals and tree care standards can be found on our [website](#).

*Accurate to 11/17/2025*



Above: From left to right, University Arborist Caitlin Gipson; President Hess; Dawna Riding in Hare Center of Sovereign Nations Representative; Toby Martin, Native American Student Association Student Representative; and Laruen Branham, Miss American Indian OSU, planting the Arbor Day tree.

## Arbor Day 2025

This year's Arbor Day was made especially meaningful thanks to two ambitious and enthusiastic students. Early in the year, Toby Martin and Lauren Branham reached out to OSU FMLS about partnering on a tree planting project. With Arbor Day approaching, a ceremonial planting was suggested, and the students eagerly embraced the idea.

As representatives and members of the Native American Student Association (NASA), Toby and Lauren wanted to plant a native species. Almost serendipitously, plans came together to plant three native trees in the Native Plant Corridor gardens directly outside Life Sciences East, which houses the NASA office.

Lauren's platform as Miss American Indian OSU centers on food security and native food sources, and her advocacy influenced the tree selections: one Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) and two Serviceberries (*Amelanchier arborea*). Both species produce edible fruit, which if not harvested by people, still provide important ecological services to wildlife and the campus ecosystem.

Both Toby and Lauren spoke eloquently during the ceremonial tree planting. The Center of Sovereign Nations (CSN) also played a significant role in this year's Arbor Day planting. Representing the CSN, Dawna Riding in Hare highlighted the seamless collaboration that made the event possible. Then Interim and now President Jim Hess was also in attendance for his first Arbor Day celebration. He shared personal reflections on the importance of trees and complimented our campus by calling it "the most beautiful campus in America." He thanked the Landscape Services team for their dedication and noted, "The Native Plant Corridor highlights our University's commitment to serve the institution and honor the heritage of so many of our current and former students as well as our community at large... I'm proud that this event highlights and shines a light on the great work of our students."

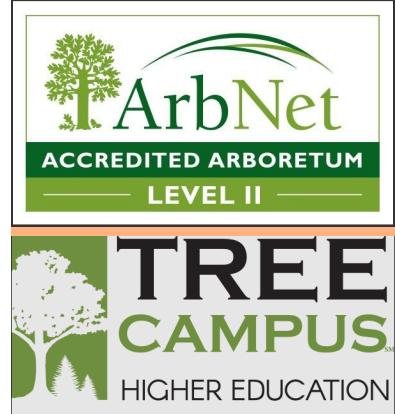
A recording of the event can be viewed [here](#).

## Campus Accolades

In addition to receiving the Tree Campus Higher Education award and maintaining our Accredited Arboretum status, our landscape team was also recognized as a Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) Green Star Award, which is like a National Championship title for grounds maintenance. This award celebrates grounds that demonstrate sustainability, exceptional talent, and an overall dedication to landscaping. Detail is everything and the grounds must be impeccably maintained. The application process takes two years to complete.

*"It takes all of our team here at landscape services and all of OSU's commitment to want to strive to be excellent. And I feel like OSU is always doing that in everything they do,"*

-Nick Ouellette, Landscaping Design Manager



An Arbor Day Foundation Program

## Tree Leadership Board Members 2024-2025

Dr. Tom Kuzmic: Prof. Emeritus NREM

Dr. Tom Hennessey: Prof. Emeritus NREM

Dr. Bryan Murray: Natural Resource Ecology & Mgmt.  
Asst. Professor.

Jana Phillips: Univ. Architect, Long Range Facilities  
Planning

David Hillock: Consumer Horticulture Extension,  
Horticulture and Landscape Architecture

Dr. Mike Schnelle: Prof. and Extension, Horticulture  
and Landscape Architecture

Casey Romero: Senior Manager Energy Mgmt. and  
Sustainability.

Cristian Contreras: Alternative OSU Energy Mgmt. Rep.

Laura Payne: OSU Extension Horticulture Specialist

John Lee: Dir., Landscape Services

Caleb Wetmore: Asst. Manager, Landscape Services

Caitlin Gipson: Univ. Arborist Landscape Services

Sydney Hagar: Pres. OSU SAF Chapter

Hannah Dixon: Pres. OSU NetImpact Club



## John Lee, Director of Landscape Services

A Ponca City native and the second of four born to a strong and supportive family, John has always been a self-starter with big goals. From a young age, John worked wheat harvests, hauled hay, cut firewood, and started a lawn mowing and seasonal color planting business; first to buy his truck and later to pay for college. His small business eventually grew into Northlake Landscapes company, serving clients in Ponca City and Tulsa. John has a strong passion for nature and people, and he is committed to encouraging and developing both to reach their full potential. He is also passionate about his faith, fitness and health, antique vehicles, fishing, camping, and he has a unique collection of over 35 chainsaws. A member of the Tree Leadership Board for five years, John appreciates the board's advocacy and support for the campus' Urban Forest through education and strategic planning. When asked about his favorite area on campus, he said he's passionate about *all* of OSU's gardens, but finds himself gravitating towards the Formal Garden and Theta Pond.



*"I saw the potential in our campus landscape while attending OSU as a student and I always envisioned and wished it looked different. Upon hearing Steve Dobbs was returning to my Alma mater to invest in the campus landscape at OSU, I had to be part of it. I was fortunate enough to join his team nearly 15 yrs ago, and much to my M.O., I have never slowed down" - John Lee*

## Lauren Branham

Miss American Indian OSU 2024-2025

Lauren is from Coweta, Oklahoma and is a proud member of the Yuchi/Muscogee (Creek) nation. She chose to study Natural Resources Ecology and Management—Fisheries and Aquatic Ecology—because of her interests in water resources management and the ecology of streams and rivers. She says, *"Water is our first medicine and gives us all life, and I feel it's my passion to protect our water."* Her dream job is to monitor streams and rivers, while working on rivercane restoration and conservation in the southeastern United States. Her favorite tree is Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*) because it... *"reminds me of times with my mom."* Lauren's favorite landscaped area on campus is the Native Plant Corridor, and she enjoys planting trees on campus and watching the colors change throughout the seasons.

*"An interesting fact about me is that I am a former Miss American Indian OSU!"*

*- Lauren Branham*

## Toby Martin

Student Leader, OSU Center for Sovereign Nations

From Tulsa, Oklahoma, Toby chose Natural Resources Ecology and Management because he enjoys learning about ecology, practicing land management for wildlife, and meeting with the many inspiring NREM professors. His dream job is to perform outreach and create green spaces in urban areas that benefit wildlife, especially native pollinators. Toby's favorite landscaped area on campus is the Native Plant Corridor, particularly the section behind Life Sciences East where he works. *"Ironweed is planted there, and monarchs cover it during their migration."* Toby said. *"My favorite tree is Basswood (*Tilia americana*) because I think its a great shade tree that's valuable for pollinators, and its other name, American Linden, reminds me of Lord of the Rings."*

*"I'm a proud citizen of the Osage nation, and through the OSU Native American Student Association I helped organize a native woody planting event with the landscaping and facilities department."* *-Toby Martin*

## Tree Relocations

### Boone Pickens Human Performance Innovation Complex

One challenge all urban forests eventually face is changing land use. Just to the north of the Sherman E. Smith Training Facility, sits an oval-shaped paved track surrounded by greenspace. This space was informally called 'Tailgate' as it was intended to host large fifth wheels, campers, and motor homes during athletic seasons in support of OSU's treasured tailgating traditions. As part of the greenspace, 18 Chinkapin Oaks (*Quercus muehlenbergii*) were planted around the perimeter. However, the area was significantly underutilized for its intended purpose. With a growing desire to support student athletes, conduct research, and foster a healthy community, OSU decided to repurpose the space. A new facility, the Boone Pickens Human Performance Innovation Complex, is slated for the site, with ground breaking expected before the end of the year. Read this article to learn more about the [BPHPIC](#). Of the 18 original trees, 15 are viable candidates for relocation. Fortunately, OSU FMLS and OSU Long Range Planning have cultivated a strong relationship based on shared goals and all parties recognize the value of preserving these trees. Keathly Nursery of Ponca City, Oklahoma, has been contracted to spade and relocate the oaks. They will be moved to five locations and will be treated as newly planted trees for one year after relocation. This includes placement on the weekly watering list for 90 days and staking for one year. OSU has had great success with tree spading and relocation in the past. When plans evolve and trees are good candidates, this is a great alternative to losing trees and starting over.



*"I'm very pleased that our team is able to relocate the Chinkapin Oaks to several different locations around campus to screen and soften some areas that need improvement. It's rewarding to see these trees find a new home on campus."* - Jana Phillips, University Architect

## Service Learning Projects

On Earth Day, April 22, 2025, the NetImpact student group hosted a service learning project and tree planting, facilitated by OSU Facilities Management Landscape Services. Seventeen students from NetImpact, the psychology program, and the landscape architecture program attended and planted four trees along the south side of Willard Hall. This site has experienced significant changes in recent years, as four Zelkova (*Zelkova serrata*) trees were lost to disease. The two River Birches (*Betula nigra*) and two Teddy Bear Magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora* Teddy Bear) planted during this project, along with other plantings, will grow to reclaim the lost forest canopy. See NetImpact planting below.

The second Service Learning Project of the year, pictured far right, was held on November 19 in collaboration with the Native American Student Association (NASA). In honor of Native American Heritage Month, students planted three Summers Tower Redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*) in the Gunderson Lawn, near the location of the leaning oak was removed earlier in the year. Twenty-two students participated, all contributing enthusiastically. For the first time, a university president joined the event to support the students and lend a hand in planting. Thank you President Hess for your participation.



Oklahoma State University

Facilities Management

Landscape Services

Facilities Management Landscape

Services Department is responsible for the overall design, installation, and maintenance of 700 plus acres that oversees the management, implementation, and development of a comprehensive sustainability program, University arboretum and plant rental program. We serve the University by providing skilled landscape services to help the OSU community achieve educational success. By doing this, we help our organization develop a dynamic outdoor learning environment through campus beautification.

## How to Donate

Please visit [OSUgiving.com](http://OSUgiving.com)

Under **Orange Passion**, select

**Campus Tree Planting and Maintenance Fund**

**20-98240**

From there, donate any amount.

For a donation of \$1,800 or more, a metal plate in the shape of bark will be placed on the tree statues next to the Cowboy Family Tree art piece located at Theta Pond. See image below.

To fill out information for the plaque, download our Campus Tributes order form [here](#).

Or scan the QR code BELOW.

Please direct any donation questions to:

Becky Brown, Director of Annual Giving, Pipeline Readiness

[bbrown@osugiving.com](mailto:bbrown@osugiving.com) | 405-269-0822



## Kentucky Coffeetree, *Gymnocladus dioicus*

The Kentucky Coffeetree is a resilient Oklahoma native. It is drought resistant, tolerant of pollution, and are adaptable to many soils, making it a great option for urban landscapes. In the fall, its bipinnately compound leaves turn a vibrant yellow, but the species provides year-round visual interest. In the winter, the ash-gray, flaky bark and large persistent seed pods on the female trees are easily visible. In the spring they are one of the last trees to leaf out before producing fragrant white flowers in June. Each tree is said to be unique, developing its own structure and branching forms. Kentucky Coffeetrees are oval or rounded in shape and can reach 60 to 75 feet in height with a 40 to 50 foot canopy spread, growing at a moderately fast rate. They are fairly easy to find on the market, including varieties that don't grow the large pods, but wild populations have been in decline.

For more information: [Arbor Day Foundation, Kentucky Coffeetree](#)

Oklahoma State University

Facilities Management

Landscape Services

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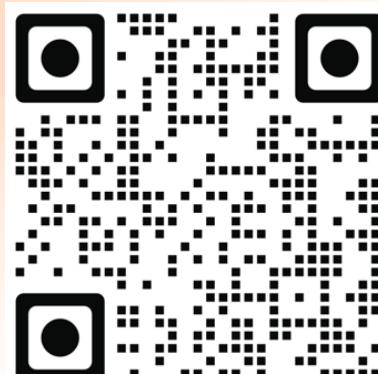
Thank you to  
**Jessica Pearce**  
(pictured right),  
Senior in  
Journalism and  
Political Science,  
for proof reading  
this document.



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## COWBOY FAMILY TREE:



**LANDSCAPE SERVICES**  
Facilities Management