

Survivor Tree

The College of Education and the COE Alumni Association hosted a community-wide Memorial Service and "Survivor Tree" Dedication on the fifth anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing held on the south lawn of Willard Hall. Special guests were area residents who lost loved-ones in the tragedy, survivors, and those who helped with the rescue, investigation, and volunteer efforts. Mayor Mike Henson, OSU President James Halligan, and the OSU Army ROTC color guard led 168 seconds of silence in memory of those lost. A gift of COE faculty member Dr. Chris Moseley, the seedling from the now-famous "Survivor Tree" was dedicated in honor of all who died in the tragedy and in special honor of one of the victims Doris "Adele" Higginbottom. The young "Survivor Tree" is marked by a plaque and is located near the Greek sidewalk in the Theta Pond area.



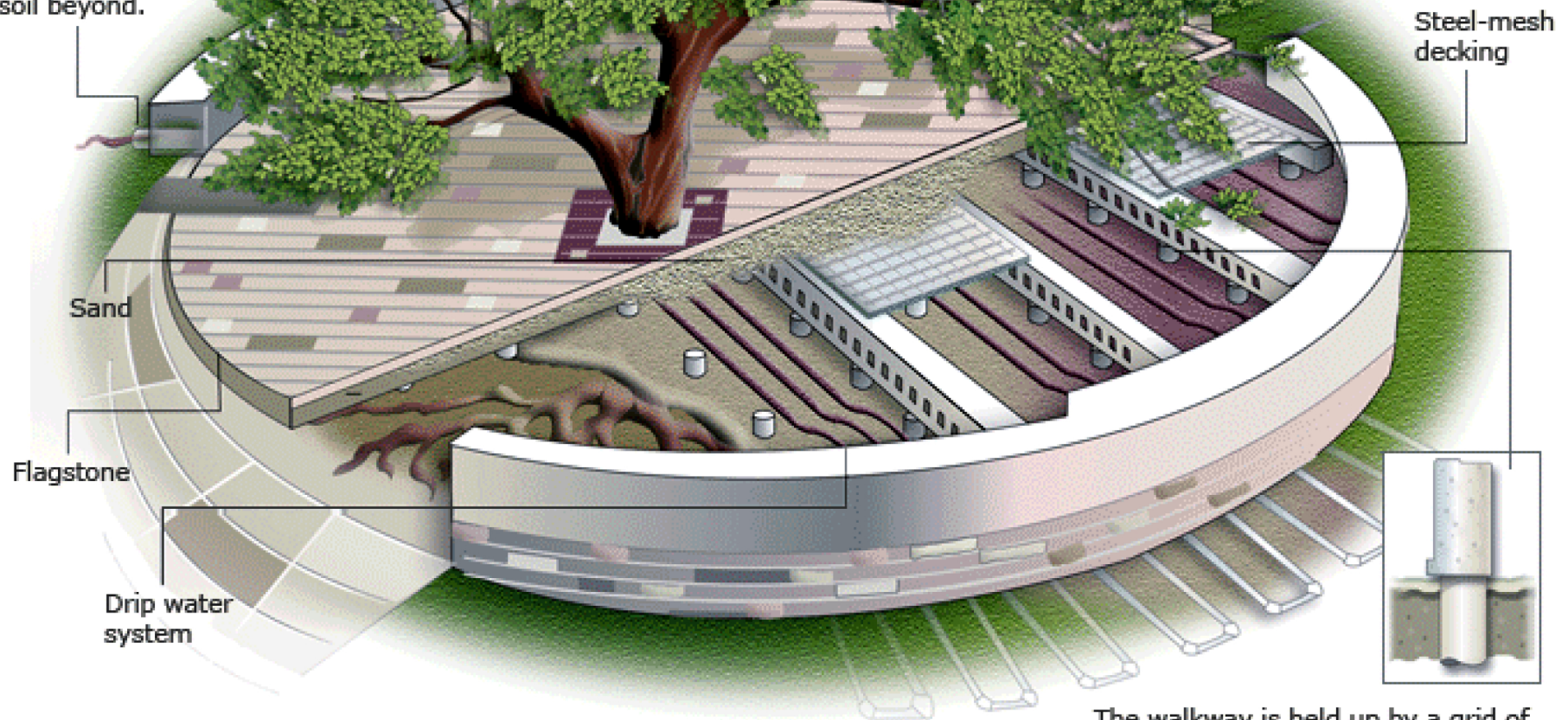
A seedling from the original "Survivor Tree," which came to symbolize hope in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing, has found a permanent home near Willard Hall and Theta Pond. Songwriter Shan Rains, an OSU employee (above with children in attendance), sang "Am I in Heaven" during the service.



An artist designed the contoured grate around the trunk. It will be replaced as the tree grows.

Through a secure hatch in the walkway, caretakers can enter an underground crawlspace for maintenance and to monitor the tree's health.

One major root that would have been severed by the wall was laid in a pipe so it could reach the soil beyond.



Steel-mesh decking

Sand

Flagstone

Drip water system

The aeration and watering system is about 3 feet deep at the original grade and extends 15 feet from the wall.

The walkway is held up by a grid of about 85 piers, some as deep as 18 feet. Crews hand dug each hole to ensure no roots were cut. One row of planned piers had to be moved because it exactly followed a root.

Survivor Tree

Survivor Tree: Witness to Tragedy, Symbol of Strength

It is more than 80 years old. An American Elm Tree in the heart of downtown Oklahoma City, it survived the bomb's blast and witnessed one of the worst terrorist attacks on American soil. Today, we call it the Survivor Tree.

Before the bombing, the tree was important because it provided the only shade in the downtown parking lot. People would arrive early to work just to be able to park under the shade of the tree's branches.

On April 19, 1995, the tree was almost chopped down to recover pieces of evidences that hung from its branches due to the force of the 4,000 pound bomb that killed 168 and injured hundreds just yards away. Evidence was retrieved from the branches and the trunk of the tree.

When hundreds of community citizens, family members of those who were killed, survivors and rescue workers came together to write the Memorial Mission Statement, one of its resolutions dictated that "one of the components of the Memorial must be the Survivor Tree located on the south half of the Journal Record Building block."

Rowland Denman, the Memorial Foundation's volunteer Executive Director and Richard Williams, District Manager for the General Services Administration Oklahoma division, called upon the expertise of Mark Bays, an urban forester with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. Bays developed a plan to save the tree and has taken it on as his project for the last nine years. The asphalt that lined the parking lot was pulled away from the tree to begin improving the conditions around it. Seeds were taken and seedlings were grown. The tree began to thrive.

The Memorial design was unveiled in 1996 with a prominence put on this ancient elm. Designers Hans and Torrey Butzer rote in their plans submitted for the Memorial, "...by creating a level ground plane along Fifth Street, the resulting site contours would emphasize the high point or promontory on which the Survivor Tree now stands. Thus, the Survivor Tree and its cascading terraces become the perfect counter-point to the sloping Murrah Building Footprint across Fifth Street."

The final Memorial design included this important promontory. Because the roots of the tree ran so deep, the promontory was put on piers so that there would be no damage to the tree's root system. Each pier was hand dug by Bays and the construction crew. The design also included an aeration and irrigation system underneath the promontory, which permits the air and water to get underneath the tree's roots. This state of the art system allows the tree to receive the appropriate amount of water and air to keep it growing for years to come.

Cuttings of the Survivor Tree are growing in nurseries all over Oklahoma. Owners of landscape nurseries, arborists, urban foresters and expert horticulturists from across the state and country have come together to work and preserve this piece of history. None of these people have ever charged the Memorial for their work. Each year, the Facilities and Grounds crew at the Memorial provides Bays and the nursery men hundreds of seeds. They plant the seeds and distribute the resulting saplings each year on the anniversary of the bombing. Today, thousands of Survivor Trees are growing in public and private places all over the United States.



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"The Memorial is grateful to Mark Bays, and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry for their long standing commitment to the Survivor Tree," said Kari Watkins, Executive Director of the Oklahoma City National Memorial. "The tree is a beautiful symbol today thanks to Mark's work and those he has reached out to across the state, who take seeds and return tree saplings the following spring."

The Survivor Tree is a symbol of human resilience. Today, as a tribute to renewal and rebirth, the inscription around the tree reads, "The spirit of this city and this nation will not be defeated; our deeply rooted faith sustains us."

