

NEWSROOM: OUTSTANDING TREE CARE PROFESSIONALS HONORED AT TEXAS TREE CONFERENCE

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COLLEGE STATION, Texas – Texas A&M Forest Service and the Texas Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture honored tree care professionals at the 39th Texas Tree Conference, Academy, Trade Show and Tree Schools in Waco, Texas in September.

Each year, thousands of tree care professionals gather in Waco to learn from national leaders in research, commercial and utility arboriculture and urban forestry. Those recognized during the conference with the 2019 Texas Community Forestry Awards Program went above and beyond when caring for and working to expand Texas' tree canopy over the past year.

“Working with the Texas Chapter of ISA to honor great examples of arboriculture and community forestry across the state of Texas is a privilege,” said Paul Johnson, Texas A&M Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator. “Each year we get many worthy nominations, and it is a pleasure to recognize the efforts of the likes of Mark Duff, TreeFolks, The Trail Foundation and West Texas Urban Forestry Council.”

The following groups and individuals were honored at the 2019 Texas Community Forestry Awards Program:

Arborist of the Year: Mark Duff

In January, 2017, Mark Duff concluded a 26-year career with the Texas A&M Forest Service. After earning a BS in Forestry and MS in Business from Colorado State University, Mark spent his career in Texas, providing technical forestry and arboricultural assistance to communities and public and private landowners in-and-around the rapidly growing areas of Central Texas.

Born in Venezuela, Mark possesses excellent bilingual speaking and writing capabilities. This skill, combined with his passion for ISA, arboriculture, teaching and people, made him a point-person with regard to the coordination and delivery of hundreds of professional bilingual arboricultural workshops, trainings and seminars. Educational events cosponsored by TFS and ISA resulted in the advancement and professional empowerment of thousands of Hispanic tree care workers in Texas. Mark Duff is an ISA Board Certified Master Arborist and a long-standing member and leader of numerous ISA membership and educational committees.

Arboriculture Project of the Year: Trees for the Blanco (Project conducted by Tree Folks, Inc.)

TreeFolks' reforestation efforts placed the organization at the forefront of the speedy recovery of the Blanco River after the devastating flash floods of 2015 wiped out more than 80% of the riparian forest. TreeFolks planted over 200,000 trees in four years and educated nearly 300 landowners on the importance of proper riparian management.

Gold Leaf Award: The Trail Foundation Urban Forestry Management Program

With over 4 million annual visits to the Butler Trail and surrounding park system of Lady Bird Lake, the urban forest is a significant part of the aesthetic and recreational appeal, providing shade, visual screening and natural beauty. The forest provides irreplaceable environmental services to the city, including cleaning air, reducing urban temperatures, providing wildlife habitat and mitigating flooding and erosion. In partnership with Austin Parks and Recreation Department, The Trail Foundation has focused much of its conservation, restoration and maintenance efforts on the forestry management needs of this area.

In 2015, as a response to the City Council approved Austin Urban Forest Plan, The Trail Foundation commissioned its

own plan to specifically address the needs of the urban forest around the lake: The Butler Trail at Lady Bird Lake: Urban Forestry and Natural Area Management Guidelines. This publication included the first comprehensive tree inventory of the area, a complete tree risk assessment, a prioritized list of land management tasks, and a five-year work plan. The framework for this plan was based around a set of five priorities: restore and enhance plant communities; repair and improve ecological function; enhance resilience; enhance the user experience and facilitate stewardship.

Over the last five years, the Foundation has used these guidelines to invest over \$600,000 into forestry work, planting thousands of trees, working with certified arborists on many large restoration projects, addressing the impact of invasive trees and soil compaction on forest health, and deploying hundreds of volunteers each year to help with these efforts, a contribution valued at over \$100,000. The impact of this work has been a model for how cross-sector partnerships can be leveraged to achieve a city's lofty environmental goals.

Outstanding Arbor Day: West Texas Urban Forestry Council

Working together as a community is the key to positive social change. In an effort to reduce carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, Alon Strive Reduced Emissions Program invests in community carbon reduction, carbon off-set programs throughout the United States. A percentage of the sales of gasoline was donated to the West Texas Urban Forestry Council (WTUFC) to plant trees on Texas Arbor Day 2018 in the City of El Paso, the site of the State Arbor Day Celebration. WTUFC is a coalition of people interested in protecting and developing the urban community forest resources of West Texas and the El Paso Region. The Council strives to provide the most recent information and technological advances in tree care and maintenance.

WTUFC members are interested in protecting and developing the urban and community forest resources of West Texas. Members of WTUFC decided to engage two community gardens in the community tree-planting project to multiply the benefits of this partnership. The two community gardens chosen were the Welden Yerby Senior Citizen Community Garden, which is a large community garden situated on the North-East side of El Paso, and the Chamizal Community Garden, which is situated in the downtown area of El Paso and is open to the community at-large. WTUFC decided to plant trees and fruit trees in the community gardens; a total of 12 trees were planted with the help of Alon Strive volunteers, WTUFC members, and community garden members. This project deserves the Outstanding Arbor Day award because it exemplifies the benefits of working together for a common goal of long-lasting community health and well-being. The trees planted as part of this project will help capture carbon, reduce emissions, provide fruit for community members to consume and enjoy, and will have a wide-array of other benefits.

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