



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2021 Texas Tree Awards announced

WACO, Texas — Texas A&M Forest Service and the Texas Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture recognized the Texas Community Forestry Award winners today at the Annual Texas Tree Conference in Waco, Texas.

“The Texas Tree Awards, through the Community Forestry Awards Program, celebrate the accomplishments of those who have dedicated their talents to spreading a leafy green canopy over Texas,” said Urban and Community Forestry Program Leader Gretchen Riley. “This program is open to anyone who has a role in building stronger communities by planting, maintaining or protecting trees.”

The 2021 Texas Arborist of the Year is Michael “Mickey” Merritt.

Each year, an outstanding individual is awarded the Texas Arborist of the Year award recognizing their contributions to arboriculture and community forestry. Nominees are evaluated for their leadership, commitment, innovation, impact and sustainability in the field.

Merritt has been working in the industry for nearly 40 years. A Certified Forester, Certified Arborist, TRAQ Qualified and Municipal Specialist, an Urban Forest Strike Team Leader and member of the National Big Tree Registry Cadre, Merritt has done stints in utility arboriculture, private industry and the last 20 or so years as an Urban & Community Forester for Texas A&M Forest Service. His geographical experience spans from Louisiana to West Texas, but wherever he is working, whether he is teaching or doing, Merritt brings professionalism and excellence. Merritt is a humble and hard-working person who continues to work tirelessly to raise his level of knowledge of the rapidly changing, complex issues facing Texas' urban forests in order to best serve Texas residents.

Merritt’s nominator said “Mickey does not seek the spotlight, instead focuses on helping others achieve their goals...and I suspect there are many here who have been helped by Mickey over the years; He casts a big shade.”

The 2021 Award for Outstanding Landscape Improvement was awarded to the City of Grapevine for their Grapevine Gateway Enhancements.

This award recognizes individuals, organizations or municipalities that have made significant contributions through tree planting, care and landscaping which enhances environmental protection, conservation, beautification, energy conservation or wildlife protection with significant impact over the years.

In 2014, the City of Grapevine completed master planning efforts to improve landscape and signage within rights-of-ways and City-owned property of designated gateways. The primary purpose was to reinforce the sense of arrival into the City of Grapevine by creating a strong visual identity while providing native and adaptive landscaping that supports pollinators and other wildlife as well as mitigates air pollution and stormwater runoff, all while increasing human health benefits. The enhanced landscaped corridors were divided into seven projects or phases.

The City has successfully leveraged funding awarded through the Texas Department of Transportation's Green Ribbon Program and the Keep Texas Beautiful's Governor Community Achievement Award with the City's Quality of Life funds to implement the master plan.

The 2021 Arboricultural Project of the Year Award recipient is the Dallas Road Transit Oriented Development Corridor/Cotton Belt Trail Extension project in the City of Grapevine.

The award recognizes a specific tree care, protection, or planting project that exemplifies modern arboricultural practices and customer service.

This project incorporated alterations and enhancements to the Dallas Road corridor to facilitate pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular access to the new Grapevine Main Street TexRail Station, Grapevine's historic downtown, and new, mixed-use transit-oriented developments.

One of the primary objectives of this project was to create a more comfortable and safer place for pedestrians and bicycles by decreasing the operational and visual scale of the corridor. The use of trees played a significant role in achieving this objective.

The 2021 Outstanding Community Forestry Program Award recipient is Keep Denton Beautiful and the City of Denton Parks & Recreation.

This award recognizes individuals, organizations or municipalities that have promoted Community Forestry through a program that significantly engages, educates or enhances the community.

Since 1999, through the Community Tree Giveaway, Keep Denton Beautiful and Denton Parks and Recreation Department have distributed over 19,000 trees to Denton residents. In an effort to help with reforestation, combat heat-island effect, and provide beautiful treelined streets, KDB hosts the giveaway each October.

In 2020, KDB celebrated its 22nd annual event despite obstacles we all faced last year. The drive-thru event was pandemic-friendly with well-established protocols that limited contact between volunteers and residents. KDB safely distributed trees to residents' vehicles through a contactless drive-up experience with added health and safety measures. Even a pandemic could not stop KDB from planting and celebrating trees.

Award recipients were given a framed, limited edition, remarked print of a famous Texas tree by artist Ronnie Wells from Salado, Texas for their outstanding achievement.

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