

ETF News

www.eugenetreefoundation.org

NEWSLETTER OF THE EUGENE TREE FOUNDATION

Building in Nature's Envelope

by Whitey Lueck

The wooded lot for sale in Eugene's south hills was a picture of paradise. Tall Douglas-firs shaded a rich undercanopy of vine maple, western hazel, and sword fern. Wildflowers carpeted the ground and a great variety of birds, insects, and other animals took advantage of the food and cover that the site naturally provided.

No one had planted these trees or the other plants or put out feeders to attract the birds. No one ever watered the shrubs or fertilized the wildflowers. Because it was a naturally healthy biological community, no serious pests ever developed and no weeds grew on the site. And it didn't cost a cent to maintain. Paradise, indeed!

The people who eventually bought the lot considered it paradise, too. They pictured their future home nestled in the trees and enveloped by the site's stunning natural beauty. What they did not realize was that, to make that dream come true, they needed to carefully protect the site's existing landscape at every step of the construction process.

Instead, they focused on getting a bank loan, designing the house, and choosing kitchen cabinetry. Meanwhile, the bulldozer arrived and began to rearrange the hilly site's soil to accommodate the house foundation, carving holes out of the hillside in one area and then piling that soil around the trees lower on the site, effectively smothering their roots. And while the bulldozer was on site, the contractor decided to do the owners a favor and remove all the "brush" from among the trees, thus removing the site's well-established

and perfectly healthy undercanopy.

By the time I arrived on the scene to discuss "landscaping" with the owners, there was not much I could do. Despite the owners' request that the site be damaged "as little as possible," they had not taken adequate steps to protect the site's valuable natural features, so those features were lost.

Building in nature's envelope—where the site's



This house on Nectar Way in south Eugene was carefully built to preserve the site's natural features.

natural features actually *envelop* the finished building—permits machinery and other activities only within the so-called footprint of the future building and in a narrow "transition zone" from 2 feet to 5 feet in width that extends beyond the building footprint. This means installing a sturdy enclosure or fence to protect the

site and imposing fines for any violations.

But building within the envelope means, too, that the design of the house and any outbuildings must affect as little of the site as possible—build small and tall instead of sprawling the house across the site. Ask yourself if you really need four bedrooms and three baths for a family of four. And instead of having an attached garage and the driveway that such a garage requires to connect it with the street, why not place the garage adjacent to the street and connect it to the house with a path? Or create a shared garage space with several other neighbors?

Rather than build your house in the center of the lot, thus reducing the natural area to fringes around the lot's perimeter, how about moving the house to one side or corner of the lot and leaving a bigger chunk of natural area? And instead

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Fall, 2005, Vol. 8, No. 4

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Mission Statement:

**To enhance
community
livability for
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the collaborative
stewardship of
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EUGENE TREE
FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 12265

Eugene, Oregon 97440

Voice Mail: (541) 284-9854

www.eugenetreefoundation.org

President's Column

Hello, everyone! Another year is coming to an end and the time has come for our current President Phil Carroll to pass the torch. As of November 1st, 2005, I have had the honor of taking that torch and working with our Board to make ETF a successful organization.

First, let me remind all of us how GREAT a president Phil has been during the past three years. Never have I known someone so dedicated to a noble cause as he is. Phil possesses a special kind of energy that enables him to find new ways of helping our community, and I am very thankful to him for that. Anyone who heard his recent speech at Eugene City Club knows what I'm talking about. As I told Phil, "You leave me big shoes to fill!" Both figuratively and literally—I think Phil wears a size 14 or 15!

With the help of the Oregon Department of Forestry, we're in the process of improving our organization to make it more efficient while using our resources more intelligently. There is a lot of work ahead but we have a wonderful Board and I'm happy to be working with them on this new mission.

It is already a pleasure to work as Education chairman, and it will be double the pleasure to be the next president of Eugene Tree Foundation. I invite you to join us for our annual **Celebration of Trees** which will occur in winter of 2006.

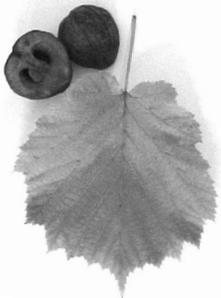


Alby Thoumsin, President

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Mark your calendar, and watch for your invitation to ETF's annual meeting:

Celebration of Trees

January 26,
2006



Legacy Tree # 8
County Farm Road
Turkish Filbert
Corylus columa

A Word from Outgoing President, Phil Carroll

It was a pleasure to serve as ETF president for the past three years, and in that brief time (yes, it has passed quickly by) I hope I have helped us move further along toward reaching our goals. I can say that being president of ETF has helped me reach mine. My interest and commitment for Eugene and its people have grown stronger. Knowing and working with the many people I have come into contact with through my role as president have been of great value to me, and I remain convinced that in working towards an exemplary urban forest, we must first improve

neighbor relations. It is through open and constructive partnerships that the best work is done. We have a long way to go, but through my cooperative leadership I think I have kept us pointed in the right direction. I will continue to support our efforts on the board of directors.

We are fortunate to have Alby Thoumsin take over. Through his daily fieldwork and with his warm demeanor, he is very much in touch with the community. His knowledge of our urban natural resources, great sense of humor, and dedication will stand us all in good stead. Carry on, Alby!

2005 Legacy Trees Announced

Eugene's 2005 Legacy Trees were announced in October. The Legacy Tree Committee, coordinated and sponsored by ETF, reviewed over twenty nominations for the honor and selected four individual trees and two groups of trees. Legacy Trees are exceptional trees that provide great opportunities for our community to learn more about Eugene's history and about care of our cultural and natural resources. Profiles of all Legacy Trees, a map of tree locations, and the online nomination form are available for download at the ETF website, www.eugenetreefoundation.org. Nominations for 2006 Legacy Trees are welcome.

The 2005 Legacy Trees are:

- **Lanson Lane Northern Red Oak**
- **Jefferson Street Horsechestnuts**
- **County Farm Road Turkish Filbert**

- **Skinner Butte Oregon White Oaks**
- **Island Lakes Oregon White Oak**
- **Chase Sequoia**

It is no surprise that most of the Legacy Trees so far are on the valley floor's river loam soils. This area of present-day Eugene was settled first—by farmers, who knew fantastic soil when they saw it—so the oldest planted trees in our community grow there. And because of the soil's depth, good drainage, and fertility, trees grow faster and bigger there than elsewhere in Eugene.

Interestingly, however, some of the *oldest* trees designated so far are also the smallest. The two Oregon white oaks atop Skinner Butte are likely more than 200 years old, yet the trees are relatively diminutive because of the site's shallow soil and extreme aridity during our summer drought.

Available Yet Rarely Seen

Since the planting season has just begun, I want to talk with you about two species of trees that we seldom see in Eugene, but are available in nurseries—if you really look. By diversifying our tree plantings, we can make our cities even more attractive places.

One of my favorites is the American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*). This medium-size tree is native to the eastern part of the United States where it shares the forests with American beeches, northern red oaks, tulip trees, red and sugar maples, to name only a few. Closely related to birches and alders (Betulaceae family), it has a doubly-toothed leaf and a sharply pointed leaf tip.

Contrary to its cousin, the European hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), which turns bright yellow in fall, the American hornbeam displays a gorgeous color that varies from deep, coppery red to orange. The shape of this nice tree is irregular and broadly columnar, and its modest dimensions (20 by 30 feet) make it a good candidate for planting under most power lines. Virtually pest tree, it tolerates poor soil conditions but requires some water in summer to do best. If you plan to purchase one, make sure you request the American hornbeam; for some reason, the European hornbeam is usually the one you'll get if you forget to specify which species you prefer. One way to ensure you get the right one is to use the botanical name mentioned above.

A second tree I'm fond of is one we began planting last year with ETF, and it fits right in with our needs. The swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*) comes from the moist and swampy parts of the central United States, all the way up to southern New England. This tree is really special. What strikes me most is its ability to look “mature” when still young. The bark will show a ragged flaky texture and the branch spacing looks just right—you can see two young trees at the southwest corner of West 12th Avenue and Hayes Street, planted in 1992.

For those of you who like the rugged broad crown of our native Oregon white oak but are not able to wait 200 years to see it mature, the swamp white oak could be a good alternative because it grows faster. It will tolerate drought (after establishment), soil compaction, and air pollution; and our naturally acidic soils will keep it from getting severe chlorosis (yellowish foliage) due to lack of certain nutrients. Even though it outpaces its Oregon cousin, your kids or grandkids will be the only ones who will see it reach its maximum height of 70 feet or so.

Interested? Here is my tip: sharpen your shovel!

Until next time,

Alby

Alby Thoumsin is a certified arborist and chair of ETF's education committee.



Horsechestnuts with husk



*From left, Legacy Tree # 7, Jefferson Street Horsechestnuts (*Aesculus hippocastanum*); Legacy Tree # 11, Chase Sequoia, (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*); Legacy Tree # 6, Lanson Lane Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)*



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If you would like to receive the e-Newsletter, please contact us via our website (www.eugenetree-foundation.org).

To read the e-Newsletter, you'll first need to download free Adobe Acrobat Reader software from Adobe (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>). It's easy to do.

Thank you!

Westmoreland Tree Removal Update

by Phil Carroll

In last spring's issue of *ETF News* we wrote of the loss of many trees at the site of the Clinic at 17th and Chambers. Over thirty trees were removed, including a rare urban grove of Oregon white oaks. Through an agreement reached between neighbors of the clinic and the developer, funds were provided to create tree plantings near the site to help mitigate the trees' loss. A spirited meeting of the Far West Neighbors took place

on October 20 to discuss the possibilities. With coordination help from ETF, support from City of Eugene Parks an Open Space, and lots of interest from neighbors, plans for the planting of dozens of trees on several different publicly-owned parcels were floated. Watch for our upcoming 2006 tree planting schedule for the date of what promises to be a great project.

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of building on a slab or conventional foundation, consider building at least part of the house on pillars or posts. This reduces the building's effect on the site's hydrology (how water flows underground through the soil) and also helps protect the roots of existing trees.

Keep in mind that the reason you bought the lot in the first place was its natural beauty and make every effort at every step of the way to protect and preserve what nature provides for you for free.

Developing a site in this fashion can add to the cost of development. But that cost is more than offset by having an intact, fully functional landscape already in place after construction is completed.

The environmental and economic benefits of this approach are considerable, yet most Eugene homeowners and builders continue to build as we always have before. We scrape the site, rearrange the soil, build the house as if it's the only thing that matters, then pay to haul in new soil and plants and hope for the best. What usually results is a dysfunctional landscape that requires constant

pampering and the application of water, fertilizer and pesticides to ensure its survival.

Even on *unwooded* sites, this approach should still be applied. Where former agricultural land is being developed on the valley floor, for example, it is just as important to designate protected areas to ensure that the soil of future landscaped areas is not abused during site preparation and construction activities.

If you plan to build a new home and wish to preserve the site's natural character, be very clear with your contractor. If he suggests that your concern is unwarranted or that driving machinery across the soil and among the trees "won't really hurt anything," find yourself another contractor. Because by choosing to build in nature's envelope, not only will the resulting landscape look and function better, but it will make you and your contractor look better, too, because you cared enough about the site's natural amenities to protect them throughout the development process.

Whitey Lueck is a horticulturist, naturalist, and landscape designer, and a co-founder of ETF. He is also an adjunct instructor for the University of Oregon's Department of Landscape Architecture, where he teaches a class called Trees Across Oregon.