

Hope is a Tree

Ken Baker, September 19, 2023

You don't plant a red oak sapling if you're a confirmed pessimist and you're sure the world's going to hell in a handbasket. If you look at that silver maple in front of the house and all you see is leaves to rake in the fall, roots to heave up the sidewalk, and bird droppings to wipe off the windshield...I mean, what's the point?

Hope is a tree. Hope for our children and their grandkids. Hope for our neighbors' families, and hope for our town. You don't plant a skinny little stick in the ground for yourself. Most of the trees you see around town wouldn't even be considered middle-aged at 100 years. You plant a tree because...it matters.

We know that tree-lined streets not only improve property values, but also have measurable effects on residents' physical and emotional health. They markedly enhance the appeal of a downtown shopping experience and have even been shown to reduce crime rates compared to treeless areas.

And those annoying piles of leaves? I've got this scraggly sugar maple on the tree lawn (the space between the road and sidewalk), and I'm not looking forward to the calluses on my hands from the rake. Or maybe I am. Maybe the idea of doing something for the neighborhood, without being asked and without being paid to do so, is somehow appealing.

Over the next several months, I'll share some observations on how the city and its volunteer-staffed Tree Commission care for our "urban forest," and a few surprising facts about how trees work.

(Note: Ken is a retired Professor of Ecology from Heidelberg University and a member of the Tiffin Shade Tree Commission.)

Public Domain photo of kids planting a tree for possible use in illustrating this essay:



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Part of my pitch to area news outlets: Seneca Daily News, Tiffin A-T, Fostoria Review Times, Findlay Courier (with possible printings in other Ogden and Gannett papers like Port Clinton and Sandusky)...

If given the option, I would call this series of six essays, "Hope is a Tree," and I have attached the first short essay, which I would also title by that name--along with a public domain photo of children helping to plant a tree--to this email. I was asked to design the series so they might appear once per month or every other month. Here are the topics on which I was thinking of writing:

- Why value the town's trees?
- Who takes care of the trees?
- Tree 101: a few tidbits about how trees work.
- How Ohio cities are planning for the "treescape" of the next 100 years.
- The science of maintaining a healthy urban forest.
- Ohio's Tree Commissions.

