

◆ FORUM ◆

Money does grow on trees

Survey aims to preserve and enhance Annex's canopy

By **ARA TREES PLEASE
WORKING GROUP**

The Annex is widely known for its tree canopy, making it one of Toronto's most desirable neighbourhoods. What is not as widely known, however, is the role our trees play in the local economy.

With over ten million trees in Toronto, the urban tree canopy is a vital city asset, with an estimated structural value of \$7 billion. Our trees provide the equivalent of at least \$60 million in ecological services each year.

Our city's urban forest is estimated to reduce energy use from heating and cooling of residential buildings by \$9.7 million per year. Trees are also major contributors to the market price of homes and may increase the value by as much as 18 per cent.

Ecological Economics journal recently published a study that found that a 7.6 metre tree can save the average homeowner nearly 8 per cent on utility bills just by the natural shade it provides. Now that's money growing on trees!

However, natural aging, neglect, poor maintenance, and atmospheric pollution over the years all threaten our trees.

It would be unfair of us to reap the benefits of our beautiful urban forest without maintaining it for future generations. In a recent survey conducted by the Annex Residents' Association, 81 per cent of respondents described protecting the Annex's nature as a "major issue."

The challenge is to ensure the existing tree canopy is not only protected, but also enhanced. To do this effectively we must first understand where the problems are, which trees

are under stress, where the canopy is sparse, and how long before a given tree will die of old age.

To meet this challenge, Michael Low, who chairs the ARA's Parks and Trees Committee, and a dedicated group of volunteers are developing a strategy to coordinate a detailed inventory of the trees in the neighbourhood. Called "Trees Please," this endeavor will expand on the work undertaken by the Grassroots Albany group over two decades ago.

Trees Please volunteers invite you to become engaged in this project. University of Toronto Faculty of Forestry students will be hired to gather information on trees by taking measurements and assessing their health. It is expected that this project will span a period of four years and will involve collecting data on the type of tree, health, size, and estimated age. Since over 60 per cent of Annex trees are on private homeowners' property, the Trees Please group are hopeful that homeowners will grant permission to access these trees.



COURTESY MARY LOW

Trees Please volunteers Anne Farquharson, Michael Low, Susan De Rosa, Dr. Nena Hardie, Terri Chu, and Maya Low stand in front of a Burr Oak that is hundreds of years old.

Trees Please also plans to identify sites where trees may be added, and, in consultation with the Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests group, arborists will suggest which species could be planted. When the data has been collected, it will serve as a baseline for the Annex community.

Community volunteers will be identified and information will be made available so residents know who to allow onto their property. Trees Please volunteers will have several roles: assisting Forestry students in collecting, categorizing, and managing data; helping inform Annex residents of Trees Please; taking photographs; community liaison; applying for grants; helping with delivery and planting of trees; report writing, and much more.

It is estimated the cost of this project could be as much as \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year. The main expense will undoubtedly be the cost of hiring Forestry students. Trees Please has applied to granting agencies to help fund this project. However, financial support from individual Annex residents will be most welcome as it is unlikely grants awarded will be sufficient to cover all expenses. Charitable donation tax receipts will be issued for amounts over \$20 (in cooperation with Evergreen).

Stewardship of our urban forest is the responsibility of each one of us—homeowners, condo owners, and renters alike—anyone who lives in the Annex. Like most people in the Annex, you probably value where you live and would like it to remain one of the city's most desirable neighbourhoods. As Annex residents we must work together now in order to reforest our neighbourhood, protect the canopy, and enhance the biodiversity of our trees before it is too late.

To make a financial contribution, or to volunteer with Trees Please, contact Michael Low at ARA-TreesPlease@gmail.com.