

# THE leaflet

WINTER 2024



## WHAT *trees* TEACH US

### *The lessons we've learned*

**Trees are Charlotte's signature amenity.** Aging doesn't prevent you from being useful.

When you are given an opportunity, take it! **There's a proper way to plant a tree.**

**Charlotte's trees are not evenly dispersed.** Every tree tells a story.

We need to follow the lead of nature. **There is altruism in a cynical world.**

**Trees can transport you to a magical place.** Shared interests bring together diverse friends.

*TreesCharlotte is a public/private nonprofit collaboration to grow, diversify and steward the city's iconic urban forest. Trained volunteers and science-based programs teach residents about the value of trees and how to plant and care for them.*

# Why I love learning from trees

## A Word from our Executive Director

When I joined the TreesCharlotte staff in 2021, I became known as “The Tree Lady,” a nickname I embraced as I began learning not only the ins and outs of the organization, but also the intricacies of trees. In the years since, trees and the people who care for them, have taught me more than I could have imagined.

And yet it is the subtle lessons of the trees that have been the most impactful. They remind us of the enduring legacy we leave behind and the impact of our actions on future generations. They remind us of the potential for growth and development in our own lives. And most importantly, as members of a complex ecosystem, they remind us of the interconnectivity and interdependence of life.

In this issue of the *Leaflet*, we asked our stakeholders, from program participants to volunteers to recipients of our programming, to reflect on what trees have taught them. The responses touched, surprised, and delighted me. From the technical to the metaphorical, every answer was as diverse as the many species of trees of Charlotte’s iconic canopy.

I hope their stories inspire you to reflect and appreciate the many benefits trees offer, the lessons you have learned from trees, and what your own TreesCharlotte experiences have taught you. May you be inspired to continue learning from trees and sharing our mission with others, so that together we embrace, celebrate and grow the canopy around us in Charlotte.

Best regards,



Jane Singleton Myers  
Executive Director



“Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth.”

– Herman Hesse

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**TREES TAUGHT ME:** Charlotte's trees are not evenly dispersed throughout our city.

Becoming a TreeAmbassador was a natural progression for Jeff Mabon. Introduced to TreesCharlotte through several TreeAdoption events, Mabon found the TreeMAKs he interacted with friendly and committed, and he enjoyed the depth of their knowledge about our city's canopy. He recognized quickly that he would fit right in with this group of tree-minded

volunteers. Mabon joined a TreeMaster training session and then led several events in that capacity before expanding his reach by becoming trained as a TreeAmbassador. "I decided to attend the TreeAmbassador training to learn more about the mission of TreesCharlotte. I really did not know about all the cool things trees can do to make our lives better. I just knew I liked them."

Mabon served as a TreeAmbassador at a Corridors Connect Event in the fall of 2023, designed to unite residents in the Graham Street and North Tryon corridor while bringing awareness of community resources like TreesCharlotte to those living in the area. It was there that Mabon recognized a surprising aspect of the canopy he learned in his training: despite having an amazing tree canopy, Charlotte's trees are not evenly dispersed throughout our city.

"Many underserved areas don't have trees and desperately need them for cooling, to reduce pollution and provide health and wellness benefits. The programs TreesCharlotte offers address some of this inequity," reflected Mabon.

Other than enjoying speaking to the community about the TreesCharlotte mission during the event, Mabon found the best part of being a TreeAmbassador at the Corridors Connect Event was leading a pinecone bird feeder craft with young community members. Next on his tree agenda.... TreeKeeper training in early 2024!



*Fast Fact:* Education is a cornerstone of our programming. TreeAmbassadors represent TreesCharlotte at outreach and education events to lead activities and answer community questions.

**TREES TAUGHT ME:** There's a proper way to plant a tree.

When Alexa and Brady Eischeid moved from Des Moines, Iowa to Charlotte in late 2022, their first task was to begin renovating the inside of their southwest Charlotte home. Once satisfied with the interior changes, they turned their focus to the outside, which included landscaping and planting trees.

Through neighbor Kathy Lindert, the Eischeids learned about TreesCharlotte's programs, and registered for the September 2023 Citywide TreeAdoption. Among the 800 trees distributed that day was an overcup oak that went home with the Eischeids. "From start to finish, the TreeAdoption day was such a wonderful experience. We were welcomed by every volunteer and had the opportunity to learn from arborist Heather Brent about overcup oaks before the planting session. She was extremely helpful as, since we're not from here, we don't know what trees grow well in this climate. It was great to speak to her so that we can be confident in the decisions we make when planting various trees on our property," Alexa reflected on their experience. She was also appreciative of the educational session that accompanies every TreeDay planting and TreeAdoption event, and remarked, "It was surprisingly very helpful as we learned that we have not been planting trees as well as we thought we had in the past!"

With their newly learned tree planting knowledge, the Eischeids set out to add the new overcup oak to their yard. The tree was planted in memory of Alexa's father, Chuck Piske, who she says had a knack for planting and caring for trees. "My mom would often find trees 'hidden' on the side of the house that he had picked up from nurseries, farms, and other places that he would plant all over our property. Throughout this entire experience, from pick up to planting, I couldn't help but smile to myself that I'm turning into my father. Soon Brady may find trees 'hidden' on the side of our home waiting to be planted."

*Fast Fact:* Since TreesCharlotte's inception 31,018 trees have been adopted by residents of Charlotte.



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**TREES TAUGHT ME:** Shared interests bring together diverse friends.

**Newest employee:** Despite being the newest member of the TreesCharlotte team, Development and Marketing Coordinator Amber Forrester has already learned a lot about trees, people, and life's interconnectedness. "I now notice and value different tree species and their contributions. Whether it's caring for them or simply admiring their presence, trees have become a constant in my life." Yet what has most impressed Forrester are the TreeMAKs, volunteers, and community members she has interacted with in her new role. Observing the diverse backgrounds and interests of each person she meets through TreesCharlotte has been "a beautiful reminder of how shared passions can forge meaningful connections."



**TREES TAUGHT ME:** Everyone has a tree story to tell.

**Most Seasoned Employee:** Business Director Heike Biller has been at TreesCharlotte since day one, in 2012, making her the most seasoned TreesCharlotte staff member. Biller says that what the trees have taught her during her time with TreesCharlotte is that everyone has a tree story. "Whenever I meet someone and tell them what I do with TreesCharlotte, they inevitably share a story about a meaningful tree in their life. There's a remarkably universal bond that trees create." Of her own tree story, Biller recalls her childhood summers spent visiting her grandparents in Germany, climbing trees in their yard with her sister and cousins. "Those core memories for me represent a carefree time of life, and I love that the trees were a part of them!"



*Fast Fact:* During our inaugural 2012-2013 season, we planted & distributed 1,242 trees. Last season, 2022-2023, that number was 5,581!

# TREEDAY PLANTING RECIPIENT

**TREES TAUGHT ME:** When you are given an opportunity, take it!

When approached with the idea of adding trees to the grounds of Carmel Middle School, then principal Dr. Jared Thompson put on his work gloves and jumped right in. For Thompson, the chance to beautify his school campus AND help build canopy for the entire city of Charlotte was one he couldn't pass up. Led by the Green Team Club, a student-run sustainability group, Carmel added 89 trees to its campus in February 2019, including a longleaf pine Thompson got to watch grow and still remembers with admiration.



Thompson points out that when building and expanding schools, trees are the obvious victims of the process, but feels that schools “shouldn't be so industrial looking. Adding canopy to our campus after renovating just made sense. The new trees made Carmel look more inviting while adding a huge value to our greater community.”

As the newly appointed principal at Mallard Creek High School, Thompson doesn't get to check in on the longleaf pine he recalls helping plant on that Saturday morning in 2019, but he likes knowing that he and his students were part of long-lasting contribution to Carmel's campus and played a role in growing Charlotte's canopy.

He sees the compatibility and need for trees as a fundamental one, not just for schools, but for all people and all areas. “Trees were here before humans for a reason, so if the opportunity arises to add more trees, why would anyone say no?”

*Fast Fact:* TreesCharlotte planted 614 trees at 9 schools during the 2022-2023 planting year.

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# SEASON Updates



**Left:** Treesilience Tree Mapping in McCrorey Heights, September 2023.

**Middle:** Shamrock Gardens, November 2023.

**Right:** Opening Day Citywide TreeAdoption, September 2023.

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## MARK YOUR Calendar

A few highlights among our many upcoming events:

- West Zip Code TreeAdoption February 24, 2024
- TreeGift Planting March 2, 2024
- Citywide End of Season TreeAdoption March 16, 2024
- TreeFest 2024 (date coming soon!)



Stay up to date by checking our event calendar. It is updated regularly and can be found by scanning the QR code or visiting [treescharlotte.org/calendar](https://treescharlotte.org/calendar). And don't forget, volunteer opportunities are marked with a blue ribbon.

*Fast Fact:* More than 16,000 volunteers have given their time to TreesCharlotte since 2012!

**TREES TAUGHT ME:** Aging doesn't prevent you from being useful.

Reflecting on the meaning behind Billy Joel's song "Vienna" and reciting from Peter Wohlleben's "The Hidden Life of Trees" Elizabeth McKee sees that "there is beauty and usefulness in aging that we tend to forget, but if we look to the trees and see the contributions of the oldest among them, we can change our perspective on aging. Even a tree stump has a purpose."

McKee and her husband William were among the first TreesCharlotte participants when they brought home a maple and a ginkgo from a "TreeStore" (now called a TreeAdoption) in 2013 and continue to be supporters of TreesCharlotte, as well as TreeAdoption participants. As recently as 2023, the McKees adopted two Loblolly pines for their yard. Encouraged at that first event to name their trees, McKee speaks of all of her trees as if they are family members: Nigh McKee, Lou, Galadriel, King, Bill, Howard, Troy, Woody, and Buzz, to name a few.

When, due to disease, two of the existing trees in the yard of their Chantilly home were forced to be cut down, McKee insisted on retaining as much of the trees as possible, finding purpose for what others would consider useless. The remaining trunk of "King" became a habitat pole, bird feeder, and bat house, and that of "Galadriel" became a fairy house, pictured above.

In her role as Executive Director of Leadership Charlotte, McKee assists community leaders in growing in their positions by taking a path of self-discovery and connecting with others on a more meaningful level. And connectivity among trees through their root system, even after they are gone, is something McKee sees through King and Galadriel every day.



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*Fast Fact:* A study by ecologist Suzanne Simard found that when a tree dies, up to 40% of the carbon stored in the dying tree transfers over to the living trees surrounding it by way of mycorrhizal networks, which also allows trees to communicate with one another.

**TREES TAUGHT ME:** Trees are Charlotte's signature natural amenity.

Having lived in London and NYC and traveled throughout the world, Board Member and TreeMaster Paul Kardous made the decision to return to his hometown of Charlotte in 2018 where he opened Row Architecture. With the lens of a native Charlottean and the design eye of an architect, one of the most comforting aspects of returning to Charlotte was the city's lush tree canopy. "Charlotte doesn't have an ocean or river or mountain scape that sets the scene for the city, but trees are Charlotte's signature natural amenity," Kardous commented.

When he was approached to join the Board of Directors for TreesCharlotte, Kardous jumped at the opportunity to help continue building the legacy of Charlotte's tree canopy. And his enthusiasm didn't stop in the boardroom, as he went through additional training to become a TreeMaster and engages in that capacity at TreeDay plantings and TreeAdoptions several times each year. His enthusiasm for the organization has even spilled over to enlisting his mother, Dr. Marie Claire Marroum-Kardous, who became a TreeMaster just last fall.

As an architect and developer, Kardous is intentional about trees in his designs, recognizing the important role they play in our lives, particularly to people in urban settings; from the shade they provide to the way they soften the landscape, as well as the health and well-being benefits trees offer. Kardous reflects that the perception of trees is that they are slow growing, which in our fast-paced world makes it easy to miss the growth and change that occurs. Yet a glance back reveals that in truth, trees get big relatively quickly and the best thing to do is to PLANT, PLANT, PLANT.



*Fast Fact:* Kardous serves as Board Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair.

# LEAVE A LEGACY

## through Planned Giving

By making a planned gift to TreesCharlotte, you'll join other supporters in growing and preserving Charlotte's tree canopy for generations to come. A few of the most common methods of making a planned gift include:

### BEQUEST

A gift from a will or trust  
(a stated amount or a percentage)

### RETIREMENT FUNDS

Making TreesCharlotte a beneficiary of your 401(k), IRA or other retirement savings fund

### LIFE INSURANCE

Naming TreesCharlotte a beneficiary of a life insurance policy

### LAND/REAL ESTATE

Leaving your property to TreesCharlotte

If you are interested in discussing planned giving, contact TreesCharlotte's Development Manager Beth Brodie, [beth@treescharlotte.org](mailto:beth@treescharlotte.org) or 704-293-4462

If you have already included TreesCharlotte in your estate plans, please let us know!

**TREES TAUGHT ME:** It is easy to take for granted life's simple pleasures, like the canopy that surrounds us. There is altruism in a cynical world.

The lush setting of the Amazon region in his native country of Ecuador provided Felix Cantos with an early appreciation of the peace and tranquility that being in nature can elicit. It was that regard for the environment which prompted him to become a volunteer with TreesCharlotte, but it was the people he met that kept him coming back.

As a TreeMaster, Cantos notes that one aspect that has struck him is how genuine the work and the people who do it are. "It is easy to be cynical about the world, but this experience proves that if you put some effort into looking, there is plenty of altruism." In his role as a TreeMaster, where he leads small groups in planting sessions, Cantos sees goodwill play out at each event he attends, noting, "everyone at a TreesCharlotte event is there because they like the people, they want to help their community or they have a keen interest in the natural world."

While he enjoys the time outdoors, the people he meets, and the work he is doing while volunteering with TreesCharlotte, there is one aspect of the experience that has surprised Cantos. "The fascinating part is observing how much work and planning goes into the canopy in Charlotte," says Cantos. "It is easy to take for granted simple pleasures, which for me is being surrounded by trees." It wasn't until Cantos began traveling, and often found himself in barren areas, that he realized Charlotte's canopy is a truly unique feature and something he is proud to be a part of helping build.



*Fast Fact:* Our TreeMasters range in age from 15 to 88 years old!

**TREES TAUGHT ME:** We need to follow the lead of nature.

The 167 brick ranch-style houses that make up the Historic McCrorey Heights neighborhood have been described as a time-capsule of mid-twentieth-century suburbia. Homeowner Margaret Person can attest to that description, having grown up in the quaint neighborhood off Brookshire Freeway. Although she has lived in Ohio for more than 40 years, Person and her husband of 43 years, are coming home to the Charlotte neighborhood she loves, and is eager to plant trees.



When Person saw an announcement in her neighborhood newsletter about TreesCharlotte’s Treesilience initiative, she embraced the opportunity to participate. Treesilience is a holistic tree care initiative aimed to protect and enhance Charlotte’s under-canopied neighborhoods while building community through trees. The three-year initiative, sponsored the first year by TIAA, Wells Fargo, Duke Energy, Truist, in partnership with the Arbor Day Foundation, allows neighbors of Ramblewood and McCrorey Heights to participate at no cost, receiving educational seminars, TreeWalks, TreeCare, TreeAdoptions, and TreeDay plantings.

Person connected with TreesCharlotte for an ivy mitigation program, as well as to find the right trees and right planting areas for her yard. Six new trees were planted in November 2023, and she envisions creating a new tree bed in her backyard in the future.

When considering her newly planted trees, Person feels a deep connection to them, particularly in a season of personal change. “Just look at the trees, making changes internally and externally as they prepare for winter. We as humans need to align ourselves with trees and make changes seasonally.”

*Fast Fact:* According to the Tree Equity Score Website, McCrorey Heights has a tree canopy of approximately 38.1%, well below Charlotte’s overall 47%, and is considered under-canopied. Efforts like Treesilience hope to change that inequity.

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**TREES TAUGHT ME:** Trees can transport you to a magical place.

Established in 1986, the Elizabeth 8K Road Race is not only one of the oldest races in Charlotte, it's also a family-friendly event with a competitive course through one of the city's most beautiful neighborhoods and has been a Charlotte favorite for almost four decades. And even better, the event gives back to the city by donating proceeds to the Elizabeth Community Association and TreesCharlotte. Last year alone, race organizers Rob Zabel and Lisa Landrum brought a donation of \$4,000 to TreesCharlotte!

On April 27, 2024, the 38th annual race will take place and is expected to be the biggest one yet, with 1,000+ runners on a route that takes them through one of Charlotte's most canopy-robust neighborhoods. For Landrum, running coach and founder of runCLTrun, trees and running go hand in hand. "One of the things that, as a runner, I do not take for granted is the beauty of trees that can lead me away from the day to day routine. When I am running among the trees, I feel as though they have transported me to a magical place," says Landrum. "It's fun to get lost in that beauty." An additional benefit of trees Landrum finds as a runner is the shade they provide, particularly while training in the heat of summer months.

In addition to the tree-filled beauty the race offers, there are many other distinctive aspects of the Elizabeth 8K Road Race, including an over the top post-race celebration, cheer-lined streets throughout the route, and unique awards including custom leather goods and handmade pottery. And of course, Big E, the race's favorite Elvis impersonator, will be there to kick things off and cheer on participants as they run through the trees of Elizabeth.



Photo credit: Show Love Media

*Fast Fact:* Registration for the 2024 race is open now, with special pricing for early registrants. Visit [www.elizabeth8k.com](http://www.elizabeth8k.com) and follow [@elizabeth8k](https://www.instagram.com/elizabeth8k) on Instagram and Facebook.

# LESSONS FROM THE *Canopy*

A 2022 canopy assessment, performed by leading urban forestry company PlanIT Geo, Inc. and distributed in November 2023 revealed many lessons about Charlotte's tree canopy. Among the key findings:

**47.3%** Charlotte's canopy coverage declined by 0.5%. That equates to more than twice the size of Carowinds.

**\$52 million** Ecosystem benefits provided by Charlotte's trees through carbon services, cleaner air and stormwater management.

**18%** Possible planting area in Charlotte. That translates to 36,795 acres.

**-14,686 acres** Predicted loss if Charlotte continues its current approach to planting. By 2050, that would put us at a mere 40% coverage.

## TREES CHARLOTTE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## JOIN THE MISSION

*TreesCharlotte is a public/private nonprofit collaboration to grow, diversify and steward the city's iconic urban forest. Trained volunteers and science-based programs teach residents about the value of trees and how to plant and care for them.*

*TreesCharlotte's vision is 50 percent canopy coverage, city-wide acceptance of responsibility to plant and care for trees and sustained funding to continue the mission generation to generation.*

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