

THE leaflet

SUMMER 2025



BENEATH THE LEAVES

A behind-the-scenes
look at TreesCharlotte

TreesCharlotte is a local environmental 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.

A behind-the-scenes look

Dear TreesCharlotte Community,

Joining TreesCharlotte at the beginning of the fall planting season in late September was quite an adventure, one that required a quick learning curve and a lot of flexibility. Thanks to the support of the TreesCharlotte staff and Board of Directors, our TreeMAKs, and community members, becoming a part of the TreesCharlotte family was an easy transition for me. As I learned from each event we hosted, no single tree makes a forest – and no single person drives our mission alone. Our real impact comes from working as one ecosystem.



As you will see on page 12, the numbers and statistics reflect the work of our TreesCharlotte ecosystem, yet it is the feedback I hear from our volunteers, our corporate partners, and our staff that gives me hope for achieving our goal of 50% canopy coverage by 2050.

Although our planting season has come to an end, there is truly no “off-season” when it comes to building canopy. While the summer heat keeps us from planting again until the fall, now is the time we ramp up our planning efforts, choosing which trees to plant, locating planting sites throughout the Charlotte region, soliciting corporate partners to support our efforts, and evaluating logistics to ensure we are ready in September when we start it all again.

In this edition of the Leaflet, I’d like to give you a glimpse of what I discovered “beneath the leaves” and behind the scenes at TreesCharlotte and invite you to discover what each of our team members does to prepare for each event and how our ecosystem works to achieve our overall mission.

Kind regards,

Allison Rhodes
Executive Director

The TreesCharlotte Way

Like any great team, the staff at TreesCharlotte works closely together with one mission in mind: to grow, diversify, and steward our city’s iconic urban forest while educating the community about the value of trees. While each event we host is unique, we follow a general process for planning, execution, and follow-up that allows each team member a defined role and touchpoint. Regardless of the project, everyone plays a vital part. So much of what we do involves building relationships: with neighbors, donors, community members, volunteers, and ultimately, with trees.



1 - LOCATION

We always say, “right tree, right place.” This applies to individual trees, planting, care, and adoption sites.



2 - PLANS

A strategically mapped out planting plan is critical to the success and health of our trees.



3 - TREE SELECTION

Determining species and working with our growers ensures we use native and naturalized trees that will thrive.



4 - ORGANIZATIONS

Support from individuals, corporations, government, and community organizations make our work possible.



5 - LOGISTICS

Getting the trees, volunteers, and supporters where they need to be is a huge undertaking.



6 - PROMOTION

Communication and marketing is key to spreading the news of our events.



7 - EDUCATION

A key component to our programming is empowering through knowledge and best practices.



8 - EXECUTION

From volunteers to parking to bathrooms and tools, we have to make sure we’ve got it all covered.



9 - FOLLOW UP

Until established, trees need to be tended to with water, pruning, and TLC.



LOCATION

Finding sites and building COMMUNITY

At our core, TreesCharlotte is all about building community while building canopy around our shared experience of Charlotte's urban forest. That's why nearly every TreesCharlotte event begins with Community Engagement Manager **Joi Mayo**, who connects with groups who are interested in partnering with TreesCharlotte to host a planting at their site, whether that be a homeowners association looking to add trees to common areas, a house of faith that wants more canopy on their property, or a school or park that is looking for more shade and green on their grounds.

In addition to speaking to prospective groups to ensure expectations and review procedures, Joi reviews applications and conducts consultations to help understand the "why" behind a group's interest in our programs. Joi invests a good amount of time listening to neighbors and helping them determine how TreesCharlotte can best meet their needs. Some of that means canvassing and talking with neighbors and some requires attending community meetings.

Then begins a very data-driven process,



that utilizes tools such as TreePlotter, Quality of Life Explorer, Google Maps, and Polaris to view heat mapping and economic status of the area, assess benefits of adding trees, and ensure there is adequate space for at least 25 trees, to be placed a minimum of 15 feet from one another.

Once a site is determined to have the necessary elements to be successful, Joi works with the group leaders who sign an agreement with TreesCharlotte outlining expectations and next steps. It's at this point in the project that they coordinate with our arborists for a site visit to walk the property, determine how to use the space, where trees will be placed, and begin the planning process.



PLANNING, PLOTING, STRATEGIZING

Joi works closely with Urban Forest Manager and ISA-certified Arborist **Alex Smith** on melding together the needs of the people in a community with the needs of the actual land. Alex begins by conducting several site visits, taking photos and notes, assessing drainage, soil, and existing trees to determine what specific species will thrive.

He then uses images from Polaris 3G and Google Maps to plot what trees are needed, which species will thrive, and where specifically to plant them, extrapolating what the canopy coverage will be

when the trees reach maturity to ensure proper spacing and maximize future tree growth and health. Additionally, Alex incorporates feedback from the community where the trees will be planted and the available species choices from our growers. It also requires extensive knowledge of which trees will work well in any given environment, particularly at sites with soil that is less than suitable for planting trees. Alex brings this all together in a scaled drawing that becomes a workable document for the rest of the team to use on the day of the event.

Alex is then responsible for deciding whether to auger or hand dig the holes for the trees, have utilities marked to ensure we don't interfere with existing buried lines, collaborate on the acquisition and delivery of the trees and mulch, and coordinate a post-event watering schedule.

AT A PLANTING it may look like trees are scattered about, but Alex looks not merely at the planted trees today, he sees the future of those trees and plants accordingly, something everyone should consider when adding new trees. In general, Alex uses a scale that allows:



- 20 foot spread for small maturing trees like cherry, dogwood, styrax, and redbud.
- 30 foot spread for medium maturing trees like maple, black tupelo, hornbeam, and persimmon.
- 45 foot spread for large maturing trees like oak, tulip poplar, sycamore, and elm.
- 15 foot spread for evergreen screening.



TREE SELECTION

CHOOSING, SOURCING AND COUNTING

There can't be TreesCharlotte events unless there are trees, and that's why Business Director **Heike Biller** works closely with Alex on the acquisition and selection process. Basing the numbers and species ordered on various factors, including how many and what variety of trees Alex determines are needed, as well as orders from previous years, Heike works with our three North Carolina growers, Worthington Farms, Panther Creek Nursery, and Scottree, to choose trees for each planting season. Thanks to great relationships with our growers, Heike gets feedback from them about what is growing well, what they recommend and what looks good for the year. As Heike refines the list of available trees, Alex refines the plans, assigning trees to sites. Any remaining trees are used in TreeAdoptions throughout the season.

Because she uses a structured data-driven approach and is meticulously organized, Heike is able to ensure the healthiest native

and naturalized trees end up at our events while Alex makes sure we are adhering to our "right tree, right place" philosophy. She also runs analytics to oversee our tree inventory and collaborate with the Programs Team to manage tree assignments, availability tracking, and delivery logistics.

So what becomes of all of these trees once ordered? You may imagine a giant greenhouse full of TreesCharlotte trees waiting, but that's not quite how it works. Trees are delivered on a per-event basis.

And don't forget about all that mulch! In general, TreesCharlotte gets 6 deliveries of bagged mulch per season, although this year we rolled out a pilot program that allowed bulk mulch to be delivered to some of our planting and TreeCare sites.

CAN YOU GUESS? What were the most popular trees adopted during the FY25 planting season? Find out on page 13!



CONNECTING WITH OUR SUPPORTERS

Our headlines often read “Free Trees!” and while we love our ability to offer trees at no cost to community members, behind the free trees are actual costs we incur: the purchase of trees and mulch, transportation and storage, tools for planting and care, project management and event execution costs, post planting watering, follow-up care and maintenance. As a nonprofit, TreesCharlotte must raise the funds for our programs and operations and works with corporate, foundation, government and individual donors to secure these funds each year.

As plans come together for the season and we refine the specifics of an event, Development Manager **Beth Brodie** is busy connecting our partners with specific events. While raising funds from individuals and foundations is a year-round effort, Beth focuses corporate support on a planting season partnership model, looking at the season as a whole to attract corporate donors. This approach allows companies to be connected to an entire season’s impacts, rather than just one event and affords more employee engagement opportunities. Corporate volunteers

are able to attend one event all together, often as a team building experience, or they can spread their volunteer spots over several events. Some companies have even had volunteers at all 3 types of our events – TreeDays, TreeAdoptions and Tree-Care and enjoy seeing the range of our efforts. Corporate partners are also critical for the work of our Treesilience initiative, which also has employee engagement opportunities.

Concurrently, Beth submits proposals and applies for grants, working with our Programs Team to understand our planting sites and goals in order to best communicate those and match with funders. In her efforts, she is supported by Mara Lind, Development and Marketing Coordinator, and a Development Committee, comprised of board members and volunteers who help connect outside resources with TreesCharlotte so we are able to do the important work of our mission.



LOGISTICS

Who, what, when, where,
how. We all know why -

TO GROW A CANOPY!

Once Joi connects with communities in need of trees, Alex makes a planting plan, and Heike places the tree order, Director of Programs **Krysten Reilly** is ready to add the event to our calendar, a task that sounds simple but involves many factors. Balancing where and when events take place by taking into consideration the location in the county, other events taking place each week, and partner requests, Krysten ensures bigger plantings are held on weekends, while weekdays are filled with TreeCare and TreeKeeper events, training, and smaller plantings.

When events are on the Calendar, Event and Volunteer Manager **Christian Battistini** takes over. You show up and there are trees to be planted, there often pre-au-

gered holes, as well as maps, signs and parking instructions, TreeMasters, tools, gloves, name tags, registration lists, water, snacks, and tree tags, and he's the man behind it all. Christian pours over every detail, using Alex's maps to coordinate the day. He coordinates general volunteer needs and creates event pages on our website and in our volunteer registration system. Then he recruits TreeMAKs, one of the most important aspects of any event. These specially trained volunteers play a truly integral part in the success of our events and we couldn't accomplish our work without them.

MORE ABOUT KRYSTEN

In addition to overseeing the Programs Team, Krysten is responsible for creating and refining new programming, which has included the addition of the Treesilience Initiative, the TreeKeepers program, and our endeavors in invasive vine removal, as well as the wildly popular TreeFest. Stay tuned for the next program Krysten is developing: TreeSpeakers.





#SPREADTHENEWS

Once an event is on the calendar, a site assessment and planting plan is completed, trees are ordered, and corporate partners are lined up, it's time to get the word out about the event and there's where Development and Marketing Coordinator **Mara Lind** comes in. In addition to acting as a liaison between corporate partners and the event by sending event details, volunteer sign up links and reminders, Mara markets the events on our social media pages (IG, FB, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube), and ensures they are included in our weekly e-newsletter and advertised in Charlotte Axios, QC Metro, Charlotte on the Cheap, and other publications.

It is important to let the public know what we are doing and how they can be involved and Mara is the creative spirit behind the trends, viral videos, and educational bits our followers see. Under her watch, our social media channels have

grown – a 39% increase on Instagram and a 10% increase on Facebook – with over 5,000 and 6,400 followers respectively.

If you don't already, make sure you follow us on your favorite social media channel.

She then attends events to take photos and videos, and gather testimonials and feedback from volunteers and community members which she shares with corporate partners and on social media. "There

is a misconception that our work is limited to adoptions and plantings, and while they are an integral component of our season, there is so much more to the scope of what we do – from educational events to care and outreach. I love having the opportunity to share our mission through a variety of media approaches and it's rewarding and fun to educate others through marketing trends. I'm happy Alex is always game to participate!"

WE RELY ON YOU TO ACCOMPLISH OUR WORK! PLEASE CONSIDER SUPPORTING US. WAYS TO DONATE:



- Checks made out to TreesCharlotte:
P.O. Box 32367, Charlotte, NC 28232
- Online donations (ACH and credit card):
treescharlotte.org/make-a-donation/
- Endowment gifts, planned gifts, donor-advised funds, stocks or corporate sponsorships:
Contact Development Manager Beth Brodie at Beth@TreesCharlotte.org or 704-293-4462.



TRAINING THE TRAINERS EDUCATING INDIVIDUALS

Education is the backbone of our programs. We can plant, distribute, and care for trees all over Charlotte, but unless we empower residents to take action on their own and arm them with the knowledge and resources necessary to do so, our mission will not spread. Urban Forest Educator **Heather Brent** ensures that TreesCharlotte is in the community and at events sharing the nuances and details behind the how in tree care, explaining the why as well.

Outside of the event, Heather works with the Development Team to ensure fulfillment of several of the benefits of being

a corporate partner. For example, many levels of partnership include private education sessions and TreeWalk events for their employees, led by Heather.

She's also responsible for getting our TreeMasters and TreeKeepers properly trained in the classroom and in the field so they are prepared to instruct participants with confidence at events. In addition to leading the TreeMAK huddle at every event, she's like a walking encyclopedia of tree knowledge and is the go-to when tree questions arise.

In addition to the educational component at TreeAdoption and TreeDay planting events and TreeMAK trainings, during FY25, Heather hosted 42 educational events with audiences from elementary to adult, reaching a total of 1,809 attendees. And that's just the official presentations Heather gave. If you've ever met her, you know she can't have a conversation without sharing an interesting fact about trees – education is at her core. "I truly enjoy teaching people about trees and love when they get as excited about them as I am."



"WHAT KIND OF TREE IS THIS?" If Heather's not around to answer, she recommends using the PictureThis app. Boasting 17,000 local species and 400,000 global species studied, PictureThis offers helpful identification and species information.



The event BEGINS

A typical “day of” means an early morning start for TreesCharlotte staff and TreeMasters who arrive long before the official start. A weekly team meeting affords the opportunity to share a map and detailed plans with the entire staff so that everyone is familiar with the event even before it begins. Team members are assigned to a variety of tasks, from meeting the tree growers and unloading trees to picking up donut holes for TreeMAKs to munch on the morning of. It’s not uncommon to find me carrying a bag of mulch or unloading a tree before giving opening remarks, and at most events you will find every staff member present, although there are often simultaneous events that have staff dividing their time between events.

An event document contains every detail of the day, including the timeline,



the set up, volunteer check in list and check in, sign placement, zone assignments, a packing list, addresses and planting plans, volunteer and partner contacts, and every detail in between. The only way we can move the needle on growing canopy is through passionate and informed supporters, so the entire staff is attuned to making sure volunteers have a positive experience, learn

something new, and feel a part of the TreesCharlotte mission.

When a successful day has come and gone, trees have been planted and distributed or cared for, and general and corporate volunteers have left, staff and TreeMAKs begin the work of cleaning up so that the only trace of TreesCharlotte are the trees we’ve planted or cared for.



FINISH UP. DO IT AGAIN.

No one's job is done even once the event is over.

Mara comes back in to email and thank volunteers, send post-adoption care info, and upload photos to our Flickr account.

Beth follows up with donors, sharing photos and feedback from the event.

Christian thanks the TreeMAKS, returns the equipment, refills supplies, and heads to the laundromat to wash gloves.

Heike tallies the trees and updates the inventory, as well as tracks team, TreeMAK, and volunteer hours.

Krysten assesses the positives and negatives of each event, performing a post-event debrief.

Joi reaches back out to community members and neighborhood associations to ensure TreesCharlotte supports them in the future.

Heather and **Alex** return to assess the health and vitality of the trees and coordinate watering as well as visits at the 1 and 3 year mark to remove stakes, add mulch, and prune.

And of course, I oversee each event with heart and hustle, jumping in at every opportunity to learn, refine, and bring our mission to life.

And then we all turn around and get ready to do it again.

OUR FY25 WINS



5,926

TREES PLANTED AND
ADOPTED OUT



105

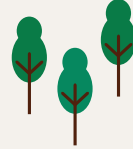
EVENTS

SEASON STATS



579

HOUSES CANVASSED



789

TREES MAPPED



2,500

SEEDLINGS DISTRIBUTED



3,797

COMMUNITY MEMBERS
ENGAGED, INCLUDING



3,478

TREES CARED FOR

1,876

RESIDENTS



1,895

VOLUNTEERS

SUMMER NOTE

FROM OUR URBAN
FOREST EDUCATOR
HEATHER BRENT



A lot of people want to get outside and plant something when the weather is sunny and warm. But our planting season at TreesCharlotte begins in late September and ends in late March to intentionally avoid these hot sunny days because it's better for the trees to plant them when it's cold outside.

During late spring and summer, trees put most of their energy into photosynthesis, rather than developing a strong root system, which takes place mainly during fall and winter. It's also when new trees have the opportunity to grow deep and establish themselves in their new home before they need to focus on growing new leaves and flowers.

The trees we purchase from our growers are 2-3 years old, and sometimes even up to 5 years old. Even the seedlings we distribute are anywhere from 1-3 years old. So when our trees are ready to be planted in the ground, the move puts a lot of stress on that young tree. New soil and a new environment can make it tricky for a young tree to establish its roots. In addition, our summers are intense in Charlotte and that's when we often have significant droughts. High temperatures and sporadic rainfall can place even more stress on that tree, stunting its growth. Like humans, stress leaves trees worn down and they become susceptible to disease and pests.

So our best advice to summer tree planting is to take a vacation from it and be ready in the fall. And if you really want to plant something right now, plant a vegetable garden! Your tree will wait for you in the fall.

TREE TRIVIA ANSWER

FROM PAGE 5: In FY25, arborvitae, holly, and serviceberry were our most requested trees at adoptions.

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1. End of season adoption 2. Blakeney Heath HOA TreeDay
3. TreeFest 2025 4. End of Season Adoption
5. TreeFest 2025 6. West Charlotte TreeGift



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JOIN THE MISSION
TreesCharlotte is a local environmental 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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