Oak to bear witness at The Arboretum at Penn State

Tuesday, March 22, 2005

University Park, Pa. -- A 37-year-old white oak, some 33 feet tall, which is believed to be the largest tree planted on the University Park campus since 1933, is destined to bear witness to Penn State's history over the next 400 years.

Kim Steiner, director of The Arboretum at Penn State as well as current chair of the University's Faculty Senate, likened the tree to a cornerstone of a building, the foundation of what will be a large educational center. "We chose something that's going to be around virtually forever."

Steiner, as well as several administration officials, including Robert Steele, dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences; Eric Barron, dean of the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, Rodney Erickson, University provost; and Gary Schultz, senior vice president; marked the planting of the first tree at The Penn State Arboretum on Monday, March 21, by tossing a few shovels of soil onto the tree's root ball.

The Hosler Oak Witness Tree is the first significant planting on the Mitchell Tract that eventually will become Penn State's Arboretum. George Biemesderfer, a Penn State alumnus in the College of Agricultural Sciences, donated the oak in honor of Charles Hosler, emeritus professor of meterology and senior vice president for research and dean of The Graduate School, and his late wife, Anna Rosa Hosler.

"This is a beacon of light for some people to come with their money and ideas to the Arboretum," Biemesderfer, said in reference to the tree's donation.

Hosler, who attended the ceremony, thanked Biemesderfer for the honor. "The donation was magnificent. I don't think anything would be greater for central Pennsylvania to develop than the Arboretum."
The Hosler Witness Tree was transplanted from Biemsderfer's Green Acres Nursery in Lititz. The oak, already a magnificent specimen, has a 14-inch diameter about a foot above the ground. Along with its 9-foot root ball, the tree weighed about 11 tons. It was transported to University Park via flatbed. Operators used a 50-foot crane to lift the oak and place it in 5-foot deep hole at the Arboretum.

White oak is a slow growing, long-lived tree typically seen in the central Pennsylvania countryside. "We chose something typical of the region," Steiner said. "White oaks are natural here. The white oak is one of the most beautiful trees."

The tree, which will be 80 to 100 feet tall at maturity, will have a trunk 3 to 4 feet in diameter, with a spreading crown. Come autumn, the fall foliage will be a distinguished red, Steiner said.

With the tree in the ground, the next step toward the completed Arboretum begins in May with construction of a bike trail on the rail bed of the old Bellefonte Central Railroad. Completion of the $500,000 project is slated for fall, Steiner said.

Planned for a 395-acre site stretching north of Park Avenue on the University Park campus, the completed Arboretum will feature landscape and botanic gardens and associated facilities, agriculture research and demonstration areas, and natural woods and fields all linked by pedestrian/bike trails.

Contact:
Chuck Gill
cdg5@psu.edu
814-865-9351