



Sherry Eppers

Trees are an integral part of the Highlands Ranch planned community.

Highlands Ranch, Colorado

Since the Wild West days of the 1800's, the high plains of Colorado have held an important place in American history. Today, some of that ranch land near Denver is growing homes and businesses. One of these places is Highlands Ranch, a 22,000-acre master-planned community south of Denver founded in 1981.

From the beginning, the role of trees was recognized and made part of community planning. Highlands Ranch has received the Tree City USA award for 21 years and in 2008 was honored with a Tree City USA Growth Award.

"The Highlands Ranch Metro District recognizes the importance of a strong urban forestry program, and we believe it's a wise investment for our community," said Metro District General Manager Terry Nolan. "Although we are a relatively young community, from the beginning we have maintained a strong commitment to trees which we believe significantly enhance the appeal of the community by the many benefits they offer."

While some communities cut back on educational efforts in 2008, Highlands Ranch showed their commitment to urban forestry and the future by providing continuing education for staff and public education for homeowners. For example, two key employees were sent to a Backyards & Beyond Education Conference to learn more about fire-safe landscaping and to help move the city toward becoming a Firewise Community as well as a Tree City USA community. Other investments for the future included the purchase of GIS field and office equipment. According to Dennis Donovan, forestry supervisor, the purchase will not only improve the city's tree inventory, it will help track maintenance needs and create maps for contractors and field technicians. In the first year alone, Dennis said, "Maps were created for in-house treatments of striped pine scale on Scots pine and contracted control of Kermes scale on oak, as well as tree watering locations." Funds were also invested in the control of invasive Russian-olives. A major thrust was the development of educational programs for landowners to recruit help with an eradication program that will allow native plant species, bird populations, and all varieties of native wildlife to flourish.

Oak Park, Michigan

"We're doing anything and everything we can to save money and maintain our budget, but it will be tough next year." These were the sentiments of Oak Park General Foreman Gary Shermetaro and they could reflect the challenges being faced by cities throughout Michigan and the United States. Gary cited as a cost-saving example the shift from 2-inch caliper balled and burlap trees to 3/4- to 1-inch bare-root stock for planting. Costs have not only dropped by one-third, he said, but the trees are easier and cheaper to ship and handle, and survival rate is proving to be good.

Belt-tightening is being experienced everywhere, but in Oak Park, this is coupled with recognition at the highest levels that trees are an essential part of the community. "Our mayor and council have always been supportive of our program," said Gary. "One of the last things Mayor Naftaly would want to see go away is our Tree City USA status."

Oak Park is now in its 26th year as a Tree City USA. Signs with the 26 years added are proudly displayed in several locations throughout this small city, including at both entrances to Shepherd Park. This popular park is adjacent to city hall and the center of many activities that are popular with the residents of the community. With solid support and the results of a recent inventory and management plan by Davey Resource Group, Oak Park's urban forestry program is well positioned for the future.



Photos courtesy of Oak Park

Arbor Day is a strong tradition in Oak Park and helps to underscore the importance of trees and tree care. Here a science class from Oak Park High School admires a new white oak they helped to plant and mulch next to the public library.

Shepherd Park is the site of many tree-related activities, including an annual bird walk conducted by local bird authority Doris Applebaum (second from right).

Another popular event is an annual flower show sponsored cooperatively by the Beautification Commission (the city's tree board) and the Oak Park Recycling/Conservation Commission.

