

Your Mother Was Wrong . . .

## *Money Can Come From Trees*

*by John Huddleston, former President of the Mississippi Urban Forest Council*

There are few careers out there that can be as challenging as a career in municipal government. The very nature of the beast-- dealing with people, dealing with a limited budget, dealing with limited space and the environment, all these and more combine to make the work both exciting and challenging. Everyone enjoys the excitement, but anything that could make the work less tedious would be welcome.

Of course, there is no quick fix, no magic bullet to the complications that come with the work. As stated before, it's the nature of the beast. There is, however, a resource that already exists in practically every city, town, and community in Mississippi that if managed properly, can improve everyone's lives while easing some of the pressures that come with the job.

What is this resource that's already in our communities and offers such promise? And hey, if it's so good how come we're not utilizing it already? The answer to this is that it is being utilized right now. Our communities receive benefits from it every day, but, and this is the kicker, as a resource it is almost never actively managed. What we get is only a fraction of what is potentially possible.

This resource is our urban and community forest. I know what you're thinking, this seems just too simple. The truth is that it actually can be simple with the assistance of the Mississippi Urban Forest Council, an organization whose sole purpose is to educate and advise on the most effective ways to utilize this valuable resource.

A little background will help explain. The Mississippi Urban Forest Council, a non-profit organization, is made up of individuals from all over the state. These are men and women from every arena of day to day life: private business, state and local governments, utility companies, and concerned citizens who've come together with the common belief that our urban and community forests are valuable and integral components of our towns and cities. Our mission for the last decade has been "to foster and promote proper management of urban forests for social, economic, and environmental benefits to people through innovation, leadership, communication, and educational services."

In Mississippi the Council works closely with the Mississippi Forestry Commission in addressing urban forestry needs. The Council also works with other state organizations including the Mississippi Department of Transportation and the Professional Arborists Association of Mississippi to promote quality urban forestry statewide. On the local level we can provide grant writing assistance and help arrange workshops. We can provide educational and technical materials that range from how to form a tree board to how trees can control stormwater runoff and much more.

The Mississippi Urban Forest Council has been providing these and other services to the urban forest community for the last decade, and now we are expanding in an effort to deliver even more service to more of the state. To this end, we are helping to establish regional chapters across the state, with the goal of reaching as many people and municipalities as possible with the materials necessary for them to make the best informed decisions concerning their urban and community forests. These are decisions that will help every municipality get the most from this valuable and very versatile resource.

Now, this all sounds good, but to look at the bottom line, what can getting involved in urban forest management actually do for my municipality?

Let's answer this from a value added point of view. The individual trees that make up your urban forest are the only part of your municipal infrastructure that actually increases in value as it ages. As these trees grow larger, they also increase the property value of adjacent properties, which in turn leads to increased tax revenues for the municipality. The estimates vary from 3% to as much as 20% in increased property values. The experts may disagree on how much, but they all agree that the value increases. Most also agree that the value increase is related to the quality and quantity of care the trees receive.

There are lots of other ways your urban forest can show a monetary benefit to your municipality. Research has shown that properly placed trees and other plantings can reduce heating and cooling energy use in an individual building from 5% to 20%. How many buildings does your municipality maintain? There is evidence that shows that

asphalt streets shaded by trees go 5 to 10 years longer between repavings than non-shaded streets and show fewer potholes. How many miles of asphalt streets are there in your community? Research has shown that shoppers will spend 3% to 10% more time and 3% to 10% more money in shopping centers/areas that are planted attractively with trees and other plantings. They also seem willing to pay more for an item from a store in this type area. Does your municipality receive money from sales taxes?

There are many other ways to utilize and develop urban trees as a resource; stormwater runoff reduction and air and noise pollution mitigation, just to mention just a few, are proven ways to save your municipality money. The Mississippi Urban Forest Council can help you develop a plan to utilize all your urban forest resources to their full potential.

These are certainly good things to consider, but again to look at the bottom line, what will it all cost? Will you actually be saving anything by the time you have planned, hired, planted, maintained, and gotten a handle, so to speak, on your urban forest? The answer to this, based on case studies from all over the country, is yes. The data shows, via statistical analysis of cost-benefit ratios, that a tree needs to live at least 9 to 19 years before the break-point even is reached. This applies to new trees, and it implies that the better the care given, the better the chance of reaching the break point at an earlier age. The older, larger, already existing trees do require a different approach because they are not necessarily where we might choose, but they can be utilized to their fullest benefit potential through awareness and good city planning.

The investment that is made on the urban forest is one of the best we can make for the municipality because practically nothing leaves the community, it adds social, environmental, economical, and political value, and this value continues to grow. How can you lose? There are, of course, many factors that will influence how you deal with your unique urban forest, but there is one fact that stands out and that is that your urban forest is a valuable asset and the better care you take of it the more valuable it will become.

So, see your mother was wrong . . . money can come from trees.

For information about joining the Mississippi Urban Forest Council or a chapter in your region or for information on helping to form a regional chapter, contact Donna V. Yowell, Executive Director, Mississippi Urban Forest Council at (601) 856-1660 or John Huddleston by e-mail address: [gopherus56@hotmail.com](mailto:gopherus56@hotmail.com).