

Herndon's Arbor Day Tradition

By Barbara Glakas

Herndon's history includes a focus on trees, which were celebrated this past Friday on Arbor Day 2013.

People plant trees on Arbor Day, a celebration that was originated by J. Sterling Morton, a Nebraska newspaper editor who later became President Cleveland's Secretary of Agriculture. The first Arbor Day was held in Nebraska on April 10, 1872, and the event resulted in the planting of more than a million trees.

The Town of Herndon was incorporated just seven years later, in 1879. Although formal Arbor Day celebrations did not begin in the town until the 1980s, the people of Herndon have always demonstrated a respect for trees.

In 1910, the Town Council passed an ordinance that made it unlawful to:

... mutilate, damage, injure or destroy any shade tree growing on any street, roadway or highway or public park in the Town of Herndon, or any shrub bush or vine set or planted thereon for the purpose of beautifying said streets, highways or parks.

It was also illegal to hitch horses or any other animal to a shade tree. The fine for violating the ordinance was \$100.

In 1935, some of the women of Herndon formed the Home Interest Garden Club. The objectives of the club included promoting interest in gardens, protecting windflowers and shrubs, and encouraging civic planting and landscaping.

There was a building boom in Herndon in the 1980s, causing many trees to be destroyed. As a result, several conservation-minded residents formed a group called Tree Action, which worked with the Town Council to make the Town more green-friendly. By the end of the decade the Town had passed a tree protection ordinance and hired the town's first community forester. The forester, John Dudzinsky, was responsible for tree management and for promoting the value of trees within our town.

In the late 1980s, the Herndon High School Earth Science Department and the Earth Science Club suggested that the Town celebrate Earth Day. The majority of the Town Council members, who also wanted to initiate an Arbor Day celebration since they had just hired the community forester, supported the idea.

The first Town Arbor Day celebration took place on April 29, 1989, at Herndon High School. A resolution passed in recognition of the event acknowledged that trees:

... reduce erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and water, cut heating and cooling costs, moderate the temperature, clean the air, produce oxygen and provide habitat for wildlife.... Trees, wherever planted, are a source of joy and spiritual renewal [and]

increase property values, enhance economic vitality of business areas and beautify our community.

The speakers and special guests at the first Arbor Day celebration included Mayor Rick Thoesen, Councilmember John DeNoyer and several other members of the Herndon Town Council, Dranesville District Supervisor Lilla Richards, and representatives from the County Tree Commission. Herndon's Town Square Singers performed the song, "Trees." A local landscape company donated a ginko tree. It was planted in front of the school, where it remains today.

Arbor Day continues to be celebrated each year in the Town of Herndon, and the Town continues to be recognized for its efforts to preserve and care for trees. A Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance is in effect, and this year the Arbor Day Foundation recognized Herndon, for the 22nd year in a row, with the national Tree City USA award.