

MDC celebrate 40 years of Tree City USA

For the last four decades, people who live in Tree City USA communities have enjoyed the benefits of having greener, healthier places to live. In Missouri, that includes 88 communities representing almost 43 percent of the state's population.

Tree City USA is a national recognition program sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation and administered in this state by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC).

MDC recently recognized the 40th anniversary of the national program by celebrating the 88 Missouri communities in the program at a special event on Sept. 12 in St. Louis at the Missouri Botanical Garden.

"After 40 years, it's clear that Tree City USA is a proven framework to help communities establish a healthy, sustainable urban forestry program," said Russell Hinnah, MDC forestry field program supervisor. "This program helps communities invest in their trees, which makes those communities better places to live."

Only 16 cities nationwide have been in the program for the full 40 years. Although none are in Missouri, there are several with 30-plus years, including Des Peres (33 years), Ellisville (35 years), Fenton (32 years), Mexico (37 years), Rock Hill (30 years), Springfield (31 years), St. Louis (34 years), University City (34 years), and Webster Groves (33 years).

At the recent anniversary celebration, MDC Interim Director Tom Draper announced that the Conservation Department is committed to making sure the Tree City USA program continues well into the future.

"The Department has set a new goal to add 40 new communities to the program over the next five years," said Draper. "Our foresters are ready to assist any municipality interested in joining the program."

Tree City USA requires communities to meet four fundamental standards. Each community must maintain a tree board or department, establish a tree-care ordinance, develop a community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita, and celebrate Arbor Day each year.

That flexibility allows communities of any size to participate. Kansas City is the biggest Missouri community in the Tree City USA program, with a population of 467,000 people. Augusta is the smallest, with 249 people.

In 2015, Missouri Tree City USA communities invested \$20 million in tree and forest management, including tree inventories, pruning, planting, hazard assessments, education, and planning.