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Trees brighten up North and East neighborhood

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The North and East neighborhood in Richmond is significantly greener with the addition of 53 street trees planted last week and at a community Arbor Day work party and celebration Oct. 22.

In addition, the city's most organized and proactive neighborhood is already looking ahead to adding more.

"We're not stopping," said resident Teri Katz, head of the neighborhood Tree Team committee that organized the planting and got the city on board with funding and assistance with the work. "We have 200 applications to adopt trees on paper, and we want to get them planted by spring."

Arbor Day is traditionally in spring, but the N&E group isn't bound by tradition. "We hold Arbor Day in fall because it is the best time to plant trees," Katz said. "We are committed to educating people about the benefits of trees."

The effort has received the attention and support of elected officials and city administrators, who turned out to add their own labor to the work being done by residents and public works crews.

"This has been in the planning for awhile," said City Manager Bill Lindsay, dressed in weekend gardening togs. "It's nice to get leverage with the neighborhood and get many hands to make this possible."

Funding for the trees came from an urban greening grant and the project helps Richmond maintain its Tree City USA status from the National Arbor Day Foundation, Lindsay said.

"It looks better, it feels better, it feels quieter and cleaner," said resident Paula Sanders. "It's just nice when people care about the neighborhood. You feel safer."

At a post-planting gathering at 34th Street and Esmond Avenue, Mayor Gayle McLaughlin emphasized the environmental benefits of trees and County Supervisor John Gioia noted that "We're planting seeds here to grow the strength of this community."

Leveraging resources is part of the not-so-secret N&E strategy for making their neighborhood not just livable, but a safe and desirable place to be.

Residents have put a lot of effort into creating an active and close-knit community where neighbors watch out for each other, meet and socialize regularly and volunteer for walking safety patrols. The N&E group on Yahoo has more than 200 members.

Officials see the neighborhood as a role model for other areas of the city. Gioia called the neighborhood "a model that can continue to expand not only in Richmond, but in West County."

• The intersection where the post-planting celebration was held is where longtime N&E resident David Cox, 52, was killed Sept. 23 when he was struck by a hit-and-run driver as he crossed the street. Cox is memorialized with a display at the corner of 34th and Esmond.

The resident who called 911 after the accident has also dedicated one of the street trees he adopted to Cox. A \$10,000 reward remains for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person responsible for his death.