

# CAMPUS GROUNDS MANAGERS GAIN RECOGNITION FOR URBAN FOREST ENHANCEMENT

## **New Tool, New National Recognition for Campus Grounds Managers**

There is an exciting new program, called Tree Campus USA, launching this fall that will be an essential tool used to support and recognize grounds managers' efforts to care for new and existing trees.

This new initiative is an idea that sprung from a partnership between the Arbor Day Foundation and Toyota Motor North America, Inc. as an effort to award national recognition to those colleges and universities across the country that are encouraging best tree management practices and educating the next generation of tree stewards. The program is the latest innovation of the Arbor Day Foundation, an organization that has supported individuals, communities and other institutions in planting, nurturing, and celebrating trees for almost four decades.

Using core standards, the Tree Campus USA program furnishes a foundation for any campus to enhance its urban forest. The program, modeled on the highly successful Tree City USA program, recognizes that campus community forests require numerous resources to flourish. Its standards of tree care and community engagement were crafted with that in mind.

By implementing the program, campuses can educate students on the benefits of trees, best practices in tree care, and how collaboration between campuses and their surrounding communities results in a healthier — and more sustainable — environment for everyone.

They can also add a valuable tool to their cache: a network

of people with connections to ideas, resources, and who share their passion for maintaining and protecting trees.

At a time when budgets are frequently stretched to their limits, this program offers an efficient framework for organizing volunteers to help support the grounds managers' objectives. The five core standards of the Tree Campus USA certification program include:



College students in San Antonio joined efforts with area elementary students to plant trees at a local park.

1. *Establishing a Campus Tree Advisory Committee*, composed of students, faculty, grounds management, and someone from the surrounding community, designed to support campus grounds managers.

2. *Creating a Campus Tree Care Plan* that contains clear goals to meet the needs of the institution. Tree protection and preservation policies, undesirable practices, and an effective communications plan provide clear and concise direction for all involved in tree care.

3. *Administering a Campus Tree Care Program with Dedicated Annual Expenditures* ensures campus commitment to the tree care objectives. The expenditures can include items such as staff training, educational programs, professional memberships, and arboricultural practices.

4. *Celebrating Arbor Day* provides the opportunity to educate and involve the campus and local area as to the benefits of trees on the campus and throughout the community.

5. *Instituting a Service Learning Opportunity* to engage the student body in meaningful tree related projects that enhance the campus and support neighboring communities

## Reaping the Benefits of Tree Campus USA Designation

Matt Gart, campus landscape architect at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, is excited about the possibilities the Tree Campus USA program offers, especially the campus tree advisory committee.

“The benefits of an advisory committee here at Virginia Tech reach far. Our tree advisory board includes a plant pathologist, forestry personnel, landscape architects, and grounds people. Their purpose is to take up landscape issues related to our campus.”

Describing the committee’s value, Matt focuses on their role as a resource for addressing landscaping issues. “When we aren’t certain of the best route, we ask for wisdom from the committee,” he says. “For example, to remove a tree in today’s climate, you need others to back you. They fulfill that role. They’re also great reinforcement when you need backing for projects. I’ve discovered that, after I get their approval and approach administration for funding, we’re much more likely to receive the financial support we’ve requested.”

The committee’s attraction is its versatility. It helps weigh the priorities when drafting the plan and imparts additional credibility to its recommendations. Its members’ combined wisdom adds value to implementation through sharing contacts and experiences, and again when its constituents evaluate the past year’s efforts before embarking on a new plan.

At Virginia Tech, the advisory committee meets in person only twice a year, yet they’re in regular communication with each other. A listserv makes ongoing discussion of current issues via e-mail convenient and neutral. The ease of responding when committee members have time results in thoughtful dialogue of concerns — and the opportunity to research questions further.

Because of the committee’s advisory function, grounds professionals have final responsibility over decisions. Yet, the advantage of hearing additional perspectives makes everyone more comfortable with those final determinations.

## Recognition for Work Well Done

**Jim Fazio**, professor in the Department of Conservation Social Sciences at the University of Idaho and longtime supporter of the Arbor Day Foundation, sees value in the Tree Campus USA program.

“Those of us who know the value of trees — their role in energy savings, water retention, air cleansing, and moderating global climate change — also know how hard it is to gain support for trees in your communities. With the Tree Campus USA program, you’ll have a team



Northland College students, university personnel and Ashland, Wisconsin community citizens gather with a new tree and Arbor Day proclamation to celebrate the time-honored tradition of planting a tree for today’s—and future—generations.

in place, more people united in purpose, and the recognition for well-managed campus grounds.”

Another value is the recognition that Tree Campus USA designation can bring to a campus and especially to the efforts of the grounds managers. Tree Campus USA-designated colleges and universities become part of a nationally recognized group of campuses that are known for their superior efforts in maintaining their trees and providing an atmosphere of environmental stewardship for their students and leaders involved on the campus. With a Tree Campus USA designation, professional grounds managers can know their efforts have been acknowledged and be proud of the part they played in gaining that recognition.

## Moving Toward Healthier Community Forests

As the Tree Campus USA program salutes those campuses whose community forests embody best practices and help campus grounds maintenance professionals meet their goals, they serve the higher mission we can all relate to: caring for and managing healthier, green campus communities.

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