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Mass Tree Planting Planned

By Tom Uhlenbrock
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Skip Kincaid has the answer for the average citizen who can't do much about acid rain or global warming but wants to take part in Earth Day 1990 activities on Sunday, April 22.

Kincaid, an urban forester with the Missouri Department of Conservation, is coordinating the planting of more than 10,000 trees at two sites on both sides of the Mississippi River in the St. Louis area.

He'll provide the trees, the shovels and the holes — but needs a few volunteers. Say, 5,000 or more.

"What we want this project to be — other than the obvious benefit of getting 10,000 trees planted in the ground — is a catalyst," Kincaid said. "We're hoping to capture the eye of the nation."

Earth Day in St. Louis actually has included nearly a month's worth of activities. It culminates next weekend with a fair in the park near the Municipal Opera. The fair will feature booths and demonstrations on such issues as recycling and waste reduction, global climate change, and alternative technologies and farming methods that are safe for the environment.

As with many public celebrations, food, music and a parade are also part of the festivities.

But organizers believe the tree planting will be something special.

Elena Irwin of St. Louis area Global Ecology, organizer of the event, said it is the largest one-day tree planting project in the nation planned for Earth Day.

"The second largest planting is in Colorado along the Platte River, and that's 3,500 trees, so we're the largest by far," she said.

The trees, most of them 8-footers, will be planted on the St. Louis side of the River at North Riverfront Park, south of Interstate 270 near the Old Chain-of-Rocks Bridge on Riverview Drive.

Jerry Naunheim Jr./Post-Dispatch

Skip Kincaid (foreground) and Mark Gruber, urban foresters with the Missouri Department of Conservation, spraying orange spots Friday to mark where trees will be planted in North Riverfront Park as part of Earth Day next Sunday.

"We're hoping to capture the eye of the nation."

SKIP KINCAID, urban forester

The Illinois spot is almost directly across the Mississippi on land managed by the Army Corps of Engineers, north of Interstate 270 and south of Lewis and Clark State Historic Park.

Kincaid said the planting at the 120-acre North Riverfront Park is aimed both at returning it to its original state and at landscaping the lake and other features in the park.

"It'll serve both functions, but the main goal is to reforest some river bottom habitat," he said. "This area was at one time all forested, but was cleared. The species we're putting back in there are trees that will do well in a river bottom area.

"We're trying to mix it up to get a good variety of species that will produce food and cover for wildlife. This area already has a goose population during winter and is visited by all type of waterfowl, including bald eagles."

Kincaid said the trees will be both native and ornamental species, including green and white ash, bald cypress, river birch, sweet gum, honeylocust, three varieties of maple and nine kinds of oak.

They will be planted in clusters to allow the park to retain its open areas and with a consideration of the views of the river from Riverview Drive.

The Illinois site, a barren tract off Route 3, will be planted only with native wetland species as specified by the Illinois Department of Conservation, Kincaid said.

"They're reforesting the area and want to turn it back into a bottomland, period," he said. "They're not interested in landscaping."

The trees have been bought for $50,000 from area nurseries. The Missouri Conservation Department provided a $20,000 matching grant, and Operation Brightside raised the rest of the money.

Contributors included Archer Daniels Midland Co., Commerce Bank, JC Penney Co., McDonnell Douglas Corp. and Union Electric Co.

Planting will begin at both locations at 8 a.m. Gov. John Ashcroft is scheduled to participate at 12:30 p.m. at the Missouri site. A ceremony also is planned for 1:30 p.m. in Illinois.

People who wish to take part can register by calling 314-726-0866, or can simply show up at either site on Earth Day.

Don't bring a tree or a shovel, Kincaid said, but do pack a picnic lunch. And don't worry about having to dig a hole.

That will been done by crews from the St. Louis and St. Louis County parks departments and from the Army Corps of Engineers and Union Electric.

St. Louisan's Legacy: Thousands Of Trees

Executive Was Area's Johnny Appleseed

By Tom Uhlenbrock
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Betty Steffans says it was 1941 when her daughter brought home a pin oak sapling from St. Stephens Protomartyr School and the family planted it in the back yard of their two-family flat in south St. Louis.

Steffans thought of the sapling after reading that more than 10,000 trees would be planted in the St. Louis area on April 22 as part of Earth Day 1990.

She has visited the family's old home on Dover Place to monitor the tree's progress in recent years and asked her daughter to check last week to see if it still stood.

"It's absolutely enormous," said Steffans, 82. "My daughter said she came down the alley on Grand Avenue, and the tree was sticking up above everything else on the skyline.

"I didn't realize how long it had been, but I'm a great-grandmother now, and my daughter is a grandmother."

Steffans said the tree is a monument to the work of the late John S. Swift, the St. Louis area's own Johnny Appleseed.

"I just feel sure there must be thousands of trees all over the city that Mr. Swift is responsible for," she said. "I thought he really ought to be remembered for all the trees he grew."

Swift, who founded a printing company that still operates in St. Louis, donated 110,000 Chinese elms to the city's elementary schools in 1939. The next year, he offered 100,000 maples. Pin oaks were given out in 1941, according to newspaper clips that also report Swift's death in 1959.

"John Swift brought Arbor Day to Missouri," said Skip Kincaid, the Missouri Conservation Department forester who is coordinating the Earth Day tree planting.

"The Conservation Department now does it statewide, but he planted the seed, so to speak."

Edward D. Jones Jr., a retired St. Louis stockbroker, also remembers

John S. Swift
Donated trees

Swift and his gifts.

"I was going to Taylor School, a private boys high school in Clayton, in 1941 or '42 and, on Arbor Day, the Swift Printing Co. gave the school 100 pin oak trees," said Jones, 64.

"At the end of the week there was still about 50 trees left — they were stuck in wet sand in the high jumping pit — and I told the coach that I'd take them if nobody else wanted them," he said.

Jones took the trees to his father's farm near Williamsburg in Callaway County, where Jones now lives, and planted them in the front yard and along the drive.

"They're just beautiful great big trees," he said. "I can't put my arms around them."

Swift inspired Jones to a life of tree planting.

"Those were the first trees I ever planted, but that started me, and I've planted trees every year since 1950," he said. "I guess I've planted 40,000 trees on my farm."

Guilt

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want to "dirty their hands" by getting involved with transgressors.

During Passover, Jews relive the biblical story of the Exodus, when God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. During an arduous journey through the desert, God molded an imperfect and complaining people into a religious family — one in which acceptance and forgiveness play a crucial role in maintaining bonds.

For Christians, Easter commemorates belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament stories about Jesus, Christians find assurances of God's love and forgiveness.

Mathes regrets that many Christians fail to follow Jesus' example of love, although they find comfort in the message. He contends that Christians who look forward to heaven after death will be amazed at the company they find — convicted criminals who repented but were spurned by people in the pews.

To Mathes, such rejection is reprehensible, given the fact that some prominent biblical leaders committed violent crimes.

"Look at David," he said. "He hired a hit man." Mathes was referring to the biblical story in II Samuel: 11, which tells of David's plots to kill Uriah so that David could marry Uriah's wife, Bathsheba.

"And Paul indiscriminately killed innocent Christians" before he was converted to Christianity and became a great leader of the early Christian church, Mathes said.

Rabbi Mark L. Shook, spiritual leader of Temple Israel, also believes in forgiveness.

"I firmly believe that if ever there was a time for a religious institution to be compassionate and understanding and present, it is when a person is in trouble," he said.

"Sometimes, the religious institution is the only thing that is sustaining that person in an emotional way."

Shook declined to discuss a recent case in point — that of Steinbach, who resigned as mayor of Chesterfield in January after pleading no contest to a misdemeanor charge of sexual abuse. Steinbach remains on the board of the temple in Creve Coeur.

Mathes spends a lot of time with convicts on death row. Among those he has come to view as Christian brothers are "Tiny" Mercer, who was executed last year for raping and murdering a woman in 1978, and Maurice Byrd, who is on death row for killing four employees of Pope's Cafeteria in Des Peres in 1980. Mathes said he spent nearly 1,000 hours last year conducting worship services in prisons and counseling prisoners.

A key to rehabilitation is a support system for convicts after they are released from jail, Mathes believes. He visits congregations hoping to drum up that support, sometimes taking along Jack Rohn, a recent parolee.

Rohn served 8½ years of a 25-year sentence for second-degree murder. He tells congregations that he "found Christ" while he was in jail awaiting trial.

"When I tell people I was convicted of murder, and that I was guilty, things get pretty quiet," Rohn said. "Most people have never come face to face with anything like that.

"In some churches, I get a great response. They say, 'God forgave you, we forgive you.' Other churches ... are as cold as winter. If Jesus himself stood there, people wouldn't budge."

Theologians point to the ideal: Forgive those who sincerely repent, no matter how grievous the sin, and welcome them back as the biblical father welcomed the prodigal son.

And then they acknowledge the reality: Many people are slow to forgive, slower still to forget.

The Rev. George Nicolatin, pastor of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, is familiar with the problem. He sees his role as a pastor as two-pronged — to lead sinners to repent and to lead his congregation to forgive.

It can be "a very difficult problem," given the fact that many people have "very little latitude for forgiveness," he said.

Nicolatin notes that even Jesus found people slow to forgive. Recall the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10, he said. Zacchaeus was a tax collector in Jericho who got rich by bilking his neighbors. When Jesus came to town, Zacchaeus — a short man — perched in the branches of a sycamore tree to get a good look at him. Jesus, who knew a troubled conscience when he saw one, invited himself to Zacchaeus' home.

"The people were griping and murmuring," Nicolatin said. "They complained that Jesus had gone to the home of that despicable man, a recognized sinner who was shaking his own people down."

When Jesus learned that Zacchaeus had begun to make restitution for his wrongdoing by giving to the poor, he told the people "Today, salvation has come to this house." Jesus reminded his followers that his foremost mission was to sinners — "to seek and save what was lost."

In Eastern Orthodox churches like Nicolatin's, as in the Roman Catholic Church, worshipers are encouraged — especially at this time of year — to confess their sins to a priest. If a priest feels a person is insincere, he may deny absolution and thereby exclude that person from receiving communion.

For Jews, the High Holy Days in the fall — a 10-day period from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur — are the time for self-scrutiny and repentance.

In Christianity's early days — even up through the Middle Ages, in some places — confession often was more public.

St. Basil wrote in the fourth century that murderers were obliged to "weep and groan" for 20 years before being allowed to receive communion. In some places, penitents might be ordered to wear "hair shirts" — garments designed to cause severe discomfort — and to stand outside the church begging prayers of those who went inside.

Monsignor Joseph W. Baker, canon lawyer for the Archdiocese of St. Louis, acknowledged that tendencies toward "rigorism" have marked Christian history from time to time. But gradually, private confession of sins became the norm, and the pastor's task now is "how best to manifest the mercy and forgiveness of God," he said.

Judaism and Christianity allow for excommunication of unrepentant sinners, but rabbis here said its use in Judaism was extremely rare. While Christian churches use excommunication, the hope is that the person will come to his senses and seek forgiveness, experts said.

The ideal is that we within the community exercise the same measure of forgiveness that God does," Nicolatin said.

"The Bible says, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' That's not saying we don't make value judgments, but it means that we should not assume God's role of judgment — and that's what we do if the community is not willing to forgive someone who repents."

Billie Boykins | Fred Steinbach | George C. Mercer

Wendi Brown/Post-Dispatch

Judy Mosely responding emotionally to a prayer service led by minister Rick Mathes (left) for women inmates last week at the St. Louis County Correctional Center at Gumbo.

Mehlville

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now with a specific plan. He said the plan is necessary to ensure that its residents receive efficient services.

With the growing number of incorporations in the county — in the Jefferson Countians part — the tax base available to county government is shrinking, he said.

"If you want to ensure you have services, you're going to have to provide them yourself," Doherty said.

The Mehlville city boundaries sought by Doherty's group take in not only the current unincorporated area known as Mehlville but also locales such as Oakville and Lemay.

The territory is similar to that included in a proposed city of Mehlville recommended in the metropolitan Board of Freeholders' countywide reorganization and incorporation plan in 1966.

The freeholders' proposal never made it to the ballot because the U.S. Supreme Court declared the state law unconstitutional that restricted the freeholders' membership to property owners.

Unlike the freeholders' plan, the new proposal does not call for Mehlville to include the existing tiny municipality of Bella Villa. That enclave would remain as an independent entity under the proposal and would be surrounded on four sides by Mehlville.

If eventually approved, it would be the latest in a series of major incorporations in the county in recent years — following Maryland Heights in 1985 and Chesterfield in 1988.

Under the new plan, Mehlville would cover 34 square miles and have a population of 70,344, according to the University of Missouri Urban Information Center and the U.S. Census Bureau.

The city would be one of the largest in population and area in the county. It would have an assessed valuation of more than $600 million, according to an economic study released by the group Friday night.

The biggest commercial complex in the new city would be South County Center at South Lindbergh Boulevard and Lemay Ferry Road, with more than 100 stores.

A meeting was held Friday night to show area lawmakers, school district officials, fire district representatives and chambers of commerce representatives the plan and to seek their support.

But two officials who attended — County Councilman Carl Breihan and state Sen. Irene Treppler, both South County Republicans — were not jumping for joy about the plan, on Saturday.

Breihan was most outspoken, saying that most South County residents would prefer to remain in unincorporated territory — especially many who used to live in St. Louis city.

"The people I've spoken to seem to be satisfied with what they've got," Breihan said.

Treppler said she realized that with the changes across the county, incorporation should be considered eventually.

But she said the approach of the three chambers of commerce seemed to be more reasonable to her.

"They're looking at all the areas" of South County, Treppler said. "It seems like a fairer approach."

In questions after the presentation Friday, Treppler and Rep. Clarence Wohlwend, R-South County, expressed concern that because the new city would take in commercial areas such as South County Center, it would be difficult for neighboring unincorporated areas to form a city.

County Executive H.C. Milford declined to comment on the plan Saturday.

The new group's economic study did a similar study before the incorporation of Maryland Heights. Pfaures is a professor of economics and public policy at the University of Missouri at St. Louis and was the administrator for the Board of Freeholders.

The study cost $8,700, paid by private contributors whose names were not made public. Pfaures projected a starting budget for Mehlville of $14.1 million and income of $14.5 million.

No property tax would be required, he said. Other taxes on utilities and sales would remain the same as levied by St. Louis County. The county has a 5 percent utility tax and a sales tax of 1 percent.

The study proposed a police force of 141 officers, a city administrator paid $75,000, a mayor with a salary of $15,000, and eight other council members. The salary of a finance director would be $50,000.

Doherty said his group also includes: Frank Ziegler, a vice president of Lemay Bank; Dr. Philip G. Mannhard of St. Louis, a dentist in Lemay; and William J. Cocoe of Oakville, who is with Cocoa Plumbing Co. of Lemay.

Cocoa' uncle, William G. Cocoa Jr., was a member of the freeholders board.

Meyer said that the three groups involved in the rival study are the Oakville-Mehlville-Concord Village, the Lemay and the Affton chambers of commerce.

That committee plans to commission a study of the feasibility of incorporating areas in the 63123 (Affton), 63125 (Lemay), 63138 (Sappington) and 63129 (Oakville) postal ZIP codes. The proposed city of Mehlville would be limited to most of the 63125 and 63129 ZIP codes.

Included in the proposed Mehlville municipality are the Jefferson Barracks historic park, cemetery and offices of the Missouri National Guard.

Also within the boundaries are Cliff Cave and Bee Tree county parks. The Mehlville and Hancock Place school districts are in the area.

South County incorporation has been discussed on and off since the early 1960s, when a plan was offered, but the plan was later dropped. In 1970, an unsuccessful plan was offered to create a new city of Meramec — combining part of South County with the Arnold area in Jefferson County.

The freeholders' plan, in addition to calling for a city of Mehlville, also had proposed a new municipality of Affton and the extension of Shrewsbury, Crestwood and Sunset Hills into unincorporated areas.

The Missouri Supreme Court recently ordered a new regional board to consider drawing up another reorganization plan, but opponents plan to appeal.

I-44 Traffic Arrest Becomes Drug Bust

A routine traffic stop on Interstate 44 near Interstate 270 led to the arrest of a man from Texas for transporting about 130 pounds of marijuana, authorities said.

A Missouri Highway Patrol trooper stopped Robert Thomas Borin, 30, of Mission, Texas, about 11:35 p.m. Thursday on eastbound I-44 just east of the Antire Road exit. Borin was issued a summons for driving in a passing lane below the minimum speed.

The trooper smelled marijuana and got permission to search the car.

Authorities say he found in the trunk two duffle bags containing 87 bundles of processed marijuana that Borin was taking from Texas to Michigan.

Borin, a special-education teacher, was released pending further investigation. He has been charged with trafficking marijuana, a felony.

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