

In 2015 the Leesburg Garden Club (LGC) celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Members of the Club chose to commemorate this important benchmark, undertaking the design and implementation of the “Native Tree Walk” in the coordination with the Town of Leesburg. To the credit of member/organizer Catherine Patton, the Walk was designed to follow along the existing path which runs from Rust Library to the north west corner of Ida Lee Park in Leesburg, VA.

The initial planting was of approximately 30 native highland trees. At the time of planting, the trees were to be a minimum of 2” caliper, of specimen quality and were professionally planted and maintained through the fall following the planting. There are bronze markers at both ends of the walk with an inscription of dedication.

Additionally, there is an information board at the entrance of the Walk. Markers at each tree has the name, both common and botanical, and holds a QR code linking it to a website created and supported by the Town of Leesburg Parks and Recreation Department. Visitors may scan the QR code to read facts about each tree.

Over time, commemorative or memorial benches will be added along the walk. The trees are sensitively arranged to preserve attractive open-space views across the Park.

Each native species of tree was selected for specific purposes. Some of the trees were chosen to create shade along the walk and by the playground to increase enjoyment on hot days and positioned to obscure less attractive features. While others were chosen for their flowering, bringing spring color to the path and attractive, blazing foliage in the fall.

There is an “oak grove” at the far west end showcasing different varieties of native oaks. The west end entrance displays a row of Virginia red cedars on either side of the walk with the idea of creating an attractive allée.

The LGC purchased the trees, paid for delivery, planting, and initial maintenance of the trees. Other members of the club designed signage for the individual trees and an information board to educate the visitor about the project and the value of planting native tree species. Town of Leesburg Parks and Recreation Department assumes responsibility for caring for the trees once they are established.

Most importantly, the Native Tree Walk serves as an educational tool to inform the community of the importance of planting trees which are native to the upper Piedmont region. These trees have adapted naturally to thrive in this climate and these soil types. They provide both food and habitat for many varieties of insects and animals, thus a vital part of a naturally evolving ecosystem. This project will be of long lasting beauty and benefit to the community, informing for years to come the importance of planting native trees.

A dedication of the Native Tree Walk was held on December 9 at 1:30 pm on the walking path close to Rust Library. Attendance was open to the public.