

Local Schools



TOP

New Black Gum Tree Planted at Cardiac Hill

AUGUST 10TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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A new black gum tree was planted atop Cardiac Hill at Southeast Missouri State University Aug. 3, beginning a new chapter in the life of the iconic gum tree.

The new *Nyssa sylvatica* ‘Wildfire,’ which is native to this area, was planted at the intersection of Cheney Drive, North Pacific Street and Alta Vista Drive, and replaces a former red bud tree, affectionately known as the “gum tree” by countless generations of students and alumni. The red bud tree came down May 25 during high winds in an afternoon storm.

The new ‘Wildfire’ accentuates the school color – red. The black gum produces red fall foliage and new red growth in the spring.

Over the past few months, a “Grow a New Gum Tree” crowd-funding campaign raised \$1,850 to help purchase the new tree, thanks to generous contributions from alumni, students, friends and community members. Those still interested in contributing to the cause may do so at impact.semo.edu/campaigns/grow-a-new-gum-tree/.

The gum tree has been a tradition at Southeast for decades. It is believed to have gotten its start in the 1960s when chewing gum was prohibited in Southeast classes. Students living in the Towers residence hall complex would climb Cardiac Hill on their way to academic buildings on the south campus and were said to have placed their chewing gum on the tree’s trunk before entering class. The original gum tree died in the late 1980s and was replaced with the red bud tree that snapped during the May storm. The new *Nyssa*

sylvatica ‘Wildfire’ is the third “gum tree” on campus.

Dr. Sven Svenson, professor of agriculture in Southeast’s Department of Agriculture and the Charles Nemanick Alternative Agriculture Garden and vice chair of the City of Cape Girardeau Tree Board, said chewed gum attached to the tree’s trunk is not considered hazardous to its health. In fact, chewed gum had already been added to the new tree’s trunk less than two hours after it had been planted, he said.

Svenson planted the new tree and was instrumental in the selection of the black gum. The new container-grown tree came from a nursery in McMinnville, Tenn., since no Missouri nurseries had large black gum trees available.

He said the previous red bud tree, *Cercis canadensis*, had suffered from heart rot for a number of years prior to the May storm. Svenson said the previous tree’s health may have been impacted by its surroundings – a driveway, a parking lot and sidewalk, making it subject to runoff, including salt used to treat these surfaces during winter conditions.

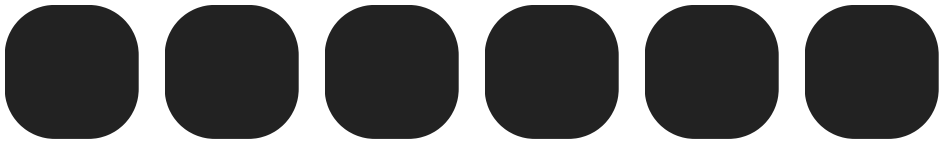
The new black gum planted Friday grows slowly and produces a deep root system, making the new tree less likely to interrupt the existing sidewalk as the tree grows. The species also is resistant to salty soils. Svenson said the top 18 inches of salt-intruded soil along with 100 pounds of concrete chunks and numerous rocks were removed from the planting bed. A soil column (‘hole’) was dug as deep as possible and the remaining soil was amended with campus compost.

The compost was made at the Nemanick Garden composting facility from Hutson Greenhouse waste, campus landscape waste, coffee grounds from campus Starbucks operations and kitchen preparation waste from Chartwells. A weed mat was installed to slow soil infiltration and create drainage below the planter bed, allowing the new tree’s roots to grow deeper and in an effort to promote overall long-term tree health. A boundary curb will be installed at a later date to discourage infiltration of the planter bed from salt-treated sidewalks.

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