

HE SPEAKS FOR THE TREES

This neighbor wants to start a planting frenzy in Dallas

Neighborhood resident Kurt Kretsinger considers himself a liaison between the people of Dallas and trees. Were he any other person, such claims might have him committed. But considering the leadership position he holds on the city of Dallas' Urban Forest Advisory committee, this seemingly bizarre self-conception is fairly accurate.

"If a group or individual wants to plant a tree in Dallas, I'm their go-to guy," says Kretsinger, who as leader of the committee's Tree Plantings team recently finished penning the "ABCs of Tree Planting in Dallas." The document, which the committee hopes to distribute widely, is filled with tree planting tips, entreaties on the importance of mulching and, most importantly, a guide to getting free trees and the funding to plant them.

"In a survey, 85 percent of Dallas people said they wanted more trees in the city, but they don't understand there are free trees out there for them to plant, up for grabs," Kretsinger says. "They just need to know how to ask."

Kretsinger learned this lesson years ago, when he decided that a 14-foot concrete median on Mockingbird needed some shading. He says he "made the mistake" of calling the city for help in planting trees on the strip.

"The city is not in the business of planting trees," Kretsinger says. "They'll help, but they won't do it themselves. You need to have some initiative."

By utilizing some of the contacts now listed in his guide, and galvanizing business owners and individuals living in the area, Kretsinger was able to plant 94 trees along Mockingbird, and later about 30 around White Rock Lake.

"The thing is, in their first two years, trees need regular maintenance to survive," Kretsinger says. "The city won't do it. That's the trick. For trees to thrive, we need neighborhood groups to take ownership in their community and participate.



Kurt Kretsinger wants everyone to learn the ABCs — of trees. PHOTO BY ROBERT BUNCH

And I'm here to help get them going."

Kretsinger can tell you about the heat islands created in neighborhoods that don't have enough trees, something his committee is studying using thermal cameras. He can discuss at length how having trees in one's yard can cut a home's energy costs. But his favorite subject is the coming winter, and why he hopes to get hundreds more trees in the ground before it arrives in full force.

"People think trees die in the winter," Kretsinger says. "Wrong. The sap in trees goes down to the roots, and the roots really grow and entrench themselves."

This, he says, is why the committee is planning to plant 1,000 trees throughout Dallas Nov. 17, including 168 near White Rock Lake. It's an undertaking he hopes other groups will mirror in their own neighborhoods and communities.

"There's a strip of Lovers Lane, for example, that's just totally barren," Kretsinger says. "There's no way it should be like that, and a lot of areas are the same. With just a little bit of work and community effort, people can improve their city so much." —DREW ATKINS

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT FREE TREES and get a copy of the "ABCs to Planting Trees in Dallas," visit dallastrees.org/plant.htm or call Kurt Kretsinger at 214.321.5224.

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