



**'You want
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somebody
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plant them'**

Ever wonder about all the big trees on Virginia's Eastern Shore?

So did Curtis Smith, director of planning for the Accomack-Norhampton Planning District Commission (A-NPDC).

Around the corner from his Accomack office stands a sycamore tree dating to the late 1700s.

The sycamore tree is on his "walking conference" route, where Smith sometimes strolls while discussing a project or program with a co-worker.

As he began noticing other big trees, a pattern emerged. Sycamores, white oaks, tulip poplars: the biggest trees were native to the area.

"It makes sense when you think about it. The trees best adapted to this area will probably have the longest lives because they are more resistant to disease and more acclimated to our climate and weather extremes," Smith said.

Smith said that people sometimes associate native plants with shrubs and ground covers. To help promote planting of native tree varieties and to celebrate the Shore's oldest and largest native trees, Smith established the "Shore Big Trees" program in partnership with the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (VCZMP), the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District as part of the successful Plant ES Natives: They're Shore Beautiful campaign.

Thirty-five native tree varieties are listed in "Native Plants of Accomack and Northampton," a guide to native vegetation published through the VCZMP, including ten varieties of oak.

On Sept. 12, Smith joined A-NPDC Commissioner and Accomack District 7 Supervisor Laura Belle Gordy and A-NPDC staff to dedicate one of those on the list: a white oak on Cross Street which was installed behind the A-NPDC office.

A water oak was dedicated the following day in Wachapreague as part of a Plant ES Natives celebration day.

An engraved stone marker accompanies each, identifying the tree, listing its expected height and lifespan, and recognizing it as a tree native to the Eastern Shore. Funding for the markers was generously provided by the VCZMP and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"These trees have been planted with the intent



A-NPDC IMAGES
Curtis Smith with a white oak tree planted on Sept. 12 in Accomack. Above: Smith stands next to a sycamore tree in Accomack that dates to the late 1700s and was the inspiration for the Eastern Shore Big Tree program.

that they will grow to one day become "Shore Big Trees" and hopefully these markers will help inspire Eastern Shore residents to appreciate these trees as cornerstones of our communities." Smith said.

He hopes to add another component to the project, which is to identify and map the Shore's largest and oldest trees.

"We are lucky to have several trees still in existence that are recognized on state and federal registries, but there are many others that need to be recognized," Smith said. Hopefully creating a registry focused on the Eastern Shore's largest and oldest trees will raise awareness on the importance of these trees, allow us to celebrate their existence, and maybe even create some friendly competition amongst locals who want to claim they have the Shore's biggest tree for a specific species."

Following the placement of the A-NPDC's oak tree, A-NPDC Executive Director Elaine Meil reflected on the tree and its potential, which probably won't be fully realized until all who were present for its planting are gone.

"If you want big trees, somebody has to plant them," she said.

Smith is accepting requests for installations at other prominent public locations. He can be reached at 757-787-2936, ext. 114.