

Tree-Taggers, Tree-Planters Mark Oldest Environmental Holiday

OMAHA, Nebraska, April 24, 2008 (ENS) - In a perfect branding match between the Arbor Day Foundation and Doubletree Hotels, a game of "Tree Tag" began today in honor of Arbor Day - the world's oldest environmental holiday. The launch was staged in Nebraska, the state where Arbor Day itself was started back in April 1872.

With forest-green ribbons and eco-friendly tree tags in hand, 10,000 elementary school students in more than 150 communities across the United States and Canada have begun taking part in a month-long project to raise awareness about the importance of trees through Doubletree Hotels' Teaching Kids to CARE environmental education program.

The 136 year old Arbor Day holiday today has become rooted in the Arbor Day Foundation, a nonprofit conservation and education organization of nearly one million members, with a corporate marketing director. Kevin Sander of the Arbor Day Foundation says, "As a result of this initiative, a whole new generation of children will truly understand their important role in enhancing and improving the sustainability of our Earth's resources for years to come."

Now in its sixth year, the Teaching Kids to CARE spring initiative will put those 10,000 students in touch with trees all during April and May.

Students and teachers will work with team members from the Doubletree Hotel Omaha Downtown and Doubletree Guest Suites Omaha to "tag" the prominent trees on their school grounds and nearby neighborhood - tying on an eco-friendly tree tag that outlines unique facts behind each particular tree.

"There are so many children and adults today who simply pass by the natural beauty of trees that populate their communities every day, without understanding how important trees are to our everyday survival," said Dave Horton, senior vice president, brand management for Doubletree Hotels.

The hotel chain "decided to have a little fun" with the concept,



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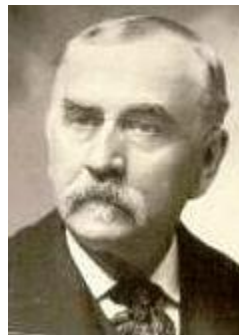
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J. Stirling Morton, editor of Nebraska's first newspaper and founder of Arbor Day. (Photo courtesy [Arbor Day Foundation](#))

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said Horton.

"Our Teaching Kids to CARE spring initiative not only immerses kids in nature, it teaches them how to creatively express their appreciation for trees and their role in the environment every day. Everyone can identify with a game of tag," he said.

For Brian McCarthy, spending the weekend in mud up to his knees is the price he pays for saving a cherished American tree and reclaiming ravaged mine land.

The American chestnut tree was once the mainstay of settlers in the eastern forests. Its hard, durable wood was used for everything from split-rail fences to furniture. Its sweet nuts were enjoyed by wildlife and by people.



An American chestnut tree in Amherst, Virginia
(Photo courtesy [American Chestnut Foundation](#))

But a fungus deadly to the chestnut trees was brought to the United States on Asian chestnut trees around 1904. Spread on the wind, the chestnut

blight kills even persistent chestnut sprouts, springing from roots of long-dead giants, before they can bear fruit. Large American chestnut trees are now found only in midwest or west coast states where they are isolated from the blight spores.

In honor of Arbor Day, April 25, the Ohio University forest ecologist and professor of environmental and plant biology recently led a group of volunteers in planting 800 American chestnut seeds and seedlings at the Jockey Hollow Wildlife Management Area, a 20-acre tract of reclaimed mine land near Cadiz, Ohio.

Working alongside researchers with the Ohio chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, the U.S. Forest Research Lab and the U.S. Department of the Interior, McCarthy helped create the hybrid, blight-resistant variety that he plants.

Researchers give seedlings of this variety a fungus that boosts their natural immune system, increasing their survival rate in the nutrient-poor, acidic soil of Jockey Hollow.

The key to the trees taking hold lies in land preparation. The







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technique, developed by the Department of the Interior and known as "loose end dumping," is showing promise as a way to transform barren mine land into thriving chestnut forests.

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