

CHRONICLE ONLINE

May 2, 2008

A tree grows in White Plains: Blight-resistant chestnut honors Ezra Cornell and launches CCE White Plains project

By Jacqueline Dowdell

A 12-foot blight-resistant American chestnut tree -- with a hearty 3,000 pound mass of roots -- has been planted in honor of Ezra Cornell in White Plains, N.Y., about 30 miles from his birthplace, to launch a new project to help restore the American chestnut tree to New York state.

The community-based research and educational program will attempt to develop blight-resistant characteristics in the American chestnut variety via a partnership of Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Westchester County; Elisabeth Radow '78, who initiated the partnership to establish a living tribute to Cornell; Marshal Case '64, president of the American Chestnut Foundation (ACF); Cornell alumni; and the city of White Plains.

At a commemoration ceremony in the J. Harvey Turnure Memorial Park, April 24, where the tree was planted, the Westchester community honored Ezra Cornell's vision, legacy and dedication to the pursuit of hands-on, practical knowledge embodied in Cornell's land-grant mission.



Provided

From left, Ken Almstead of Almstead Tree and Shrub Care (and a CCE of Westchester County board member); Elisabeth Radow '78; White Plains Parks Commissioner Arnie Abramowitz; Marshal Case, president of the American Chestnut Foundation and a Cornell alumnus; Barbara Sacks, executive director, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester County; and White Plains Mayor Joseph Delfino.

Through research and breeding, the ACF works to restore the American chestnut tree to the northeastern United States. The tree has been endangered from chestnut blight, a lethal fungus infestation, since the early part of the 20th century. Chestnut blight not only altered the landscape of the region's woodlands but also severely impacted rural economies, which depended on the American chestnut's nut and lumber harvests.

The ACF estimates that before the blight 4 billion chestnut trees covered 200 million acres of woodlands.

"This tree represents how positive forces can bring people together," said Radow, who acted as co-sponsor with the ACF to bring the Virginia-born American chestnut tree to White Plains. The tree is a product of the foundation's blight-resistant breeding program.

Cornell Chronicle:

Susan Lang
(607) 255-3613
ssl4@cornell.edu

Media Contact:

Press Relations Office
(607) 255-6074
pressoffice@cornell.edu

Related Information:

[Cornell Cooperative Extension](#)

[CCE Westchester County](#)

[American Chestnut
Foundation](#)

Four White Plains employees, who graduated from CCE's Certified Tree Steward Program, will help monitor the tree, said Barbara Sacks, executive director of CCE of Westchester County. The tree steward program has taught more than 40 public employees in Westchester's departments of public works, highways and parks in the proper siting and care of urban trees.

CCE also seeks to educate the Westchester population, particularly its young people, about the American chestnut. A three-panel exhibition installed near the chestnut tree explains the history and importance of the variety.

"Thousands of people visit the park every year," said Sacks. "The tree will be widely viewed."

Since the CCE chestnut program partnership began, other Westchester County organizations have become interested in planting two smaller chestnut trees in the community, said Sacks.

Jacqueline Dowdell is communications coordinator for Cornell Cooperative Extension.

##

| [May story index](#) | [Cornell Chronicle Online Home Page](#) |