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York County man monitors local forests for Chestnut Tree Society

LAUREN WHETZEL *The York Dispatch*
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Just like traditional hobbies such as card games and sports, Dave Armstrong said, maintaining and preserving chestnut trees in York County is his "thing."

The 70-year-old from Hanover maintains more than 1,200 chestnut trees located in Codorus State Park's four tree orchards, as well as 80 other chestnut trees at his home across the street from the park.



Dave Armstrong of the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation mans the organization's booth at the Farm Show. (Bill Kalina Photo)

Armstrong -- a member of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation -- spent Monday speaking to visitors at the foundation's exhibit at the 95th Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg.

A few other members, like Armstrong, shared information to visitors regarding breeding blight resistant chestnut trees and getting more chestnut trees back into the nation's forests.

Chestnut blight was a devastating disease of the American chestnut tree that in the early 1900s caused a mass extinction of this once plentiful tree from its historic range in the southeast United States, Armstrong said.

Each year, more than 300 chestnuts are planted at Codorus State Park, he said.

"The park gives me more territory each year to manage the trees, which could be a bad thing, because it makes me have to work harder," said Armstrong, jokingly.

Of the 324 chestnut trees that were planted last spring, some are already nearly 3 feet tall, he said, noting that the tree grows rapidly.

And the trees that were planted in 2004 are now about 15 to 20 feet, but many were killed off by blight, he added.

Since 1997, the Pennsylvania chapter of the foundation -- which boasts more than 1,000 members -- has set up an exhibit at the farm show, including posters, pamphlets of information and raffle tickets to win one of two chestnut tables.

Seven-year-old Sam Johnstin was allowed to miss a day of school Monday to visit the Farm Show with his family.

The Johnstin family of Maytown, Lancaster County, visited the foundation's exhibit and played a wood guessing game, which was on display, to try and identify which shade of wood was chestnut.

"(Sam and I) were a little confused by the different shades of wood," said Sam's father, Jason Johnstin, who correctly identified the oak but failed to properly guess which shade was chestnut.

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation's exhibit is located in the show's Main Hall and will be on display until the show's final day, Saturday.

-- Reach Lauren Whetzel at 505-5432 or lwhetzel@yorkdispatch.com.

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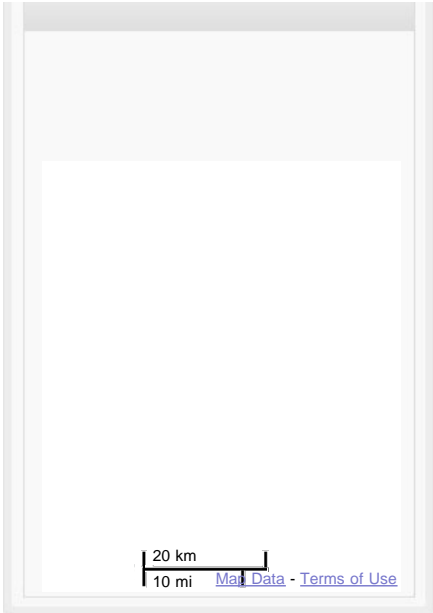
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