

Indiana Community Tree Stewards

by Carrie Tauscher, Indiana DNR Forestry, Volunteer Coordinator/Urban Forester

Photos Courtesy Indiana DNR Forestry unless otherwise indicated

Origin and Nuts and Bolts

The Indiana Community Tree Stewards course was developed in 1995 by Pam Louks, DNR Forestry, with assistance from Dick Crum and Jim Barbour from Purdue Extension, Marion County. It was developed in order to actively engage Hoosiers (Indianans) in various aspects of urban forestry and to begin to generate a base of urban forestry advocates. Currently Indiana has over 1,200 Tree Stewards throughout the state.

Participants who complete the course are asked to donate 15 hours of volunteer service to their community or state urban forestry programs. These hours can include tree planting, maintenance and care, advocacy for the urban forest, presentations on tree planting and care, or engaging and involving citizens in urban forestry. Many Tree Stewards become involved in local tree related nonprofit groups and local tree boards and share their acquired knowledge with other organizations they are a part of, including Master Gardeners, garden clubs, faith-based organizations, and youth groups.

Tree Stewards start by attending the 16-18 hour core training course that consists of classroom and field training. We have found that two back-to-back days of training lead to better test scores and retention of volunteers than do more spread-out, half-day workshops covering the same content.

Trainers include regional/local experts, arborists, university professors, DNR Forestry staff (me), and municipal foresters. Curriculum for the course covers a broad gamut that starts from the ground up with an introduction to urban soils and tree physiology. We also cover species and site selection, proper planting and establishment care, the benefits of trees, the definition of urban forestry, pruning, risk assessment, urban woodlot management, and volunteer opportunities.

You can see the Tree Stewards curriculum at <http://iufc.org/media/TSCurriculumForWeb.pdf>.

The program is primarily coordinated by the IDNR Community and Urban Forestry Volunteer coordinator. This includes identifying host communities, finding the local speakers, and promoting the program throughout the region. Annually we put on three full Tree Steward



Tree Stewards oversee tree planting in Valparaiso, Indiana. Photo by Ann Brugos

programs—one each in North, Central, and Southern Indiana with the goal of training 80-100 new Tree Stewards annually.

In addition, shorter, specialized courses are offered as advanced Tree Steward training. For instance, recently we have partnered with Purdue Entomology to put on five Forest Pest Outreach and Survey Program (FOSP) Early Detector trainings so volunteer surveyors can look for/identify Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), Asian Longhorned Beetle (ALB) and Thousand Cankers Disease (TCD). We have also hosted Winter Tree ID courses, Tree ID refresher walks, and structural pruning classes.

Morale and Motivation

We try to keep our Tree Steward audience motivated and informed by regularly passing on interesting information to the Tree Steward network. Because our attendees range from municipal staff and certified arborists to local Master Gardeners and homeowners, I do not assume that a topic is beyond the group's interest. I have yet to receive a complaint about too much email. I try to include a few guiding comments with each forwarded email to give perspective on how the topic affects Indiana and suggestions on who with and how to share the information.

I try to regularly send out countdowns to major tree events, like our Arbor Day series. Quarterly I send a friendly reminder to volunteers to send in their logged hours, and of course, I regularly send heartfelt thanks and appreciation for all of the work these volunteers do. They do so much!

We have an Indiana Community Tree Steward FaceBook Group where I regularly share and post new information and photos and event information and where Tree Stewards who are interested in social media can communicate with each other. The number of participants on FaceBook grows after each training, and I am seeing more



Indiana Tree Stewards staff a booth to help recruit additional stewards.



Hearty Tree Stewards in Owen County, Indiana.



Arbor Day tree planting in Lafayette, Indiana

and more shares and views by people outside the group.

I try to promote open communication, regularly asking for opinions and updates, and I send out interest polls for potential education opportunities. I tailor my specific trainings to areas of the state that show interest in the topic to be presented. This polling and planning has helped improve attendance and reduces



Some recent Tree Steward graduates

the need to cancel classes.

In return I feel I have a pretty open and two-sided relationship with our volunteers. They often send notes, updates, and follow-up on events they put on or attended as a volunteer. I also get information on programs and initiatives passed on to me that I may not have normally come in contact with. This sharing has proven invaluable.

There are always things that need to be improved and ways to grow. I am strongly encouraging our Tree Stewards to participate in or develop new Neighborhoods Month Events, like fall tree planting. With summer droughts stressing municipal crews and tree planting groups with watering, fall plantings are becoming more critical for tree establishment and survival.

I asked a few of the tree stewards what keeps them volunteering for trees. Overwhelmingly they like what they do and they enjoy the groups and organizations they volunteer with. They appreciate the “fun and passionate coordinator,” and their interest is held by how multifaceted urban forestry work can be. I think this quote sums it up well, “The neighborhood was so appreciative. They made me feel like I contributed much more than I did.”

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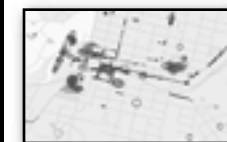
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