



RICHARD HERTZLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER PHOTOS

John Rosenfeld, left, Dan White, center, and Ron Chen, right, measure a tree trunk.

||||| FLORA |||||

A TALL ORDER

Plant lovers take the measure of Lancaster County's largest trees



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To explore big trees throughout Pennsylvania, visit pabigtrees.com. The group assigns points to trees. The points are a calculation of circumference, height and the spread of the crown. The database is a resource of the Pennsylvania Forestry Association.

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The tree stands tall, branches stretching over the traffic on Columbia Avenue, vines climbing up the thick trunk.

There used to be millions just like it before Dutch elm disease knocked down centuries of trees. This elm is so big, it could be old enough for the Continental Congress to have passed beneath its canopy from Lancaster to York in 1777.

Think of the history of this tree. Marvel in its size, and see its seedlings that can be planted, making many more just like it. That's what John Rosenfeld wants you to do. Notice these trees. And think about what we're losing when they're chopped down.

A few weeks ago, Rosenfeld led a group of native plant lovers around Lancaster County to measure big trees like this elm. To do that, they dodged traffic and waded in a creek. That afternoon, they discovered a few new champion trees. They ate fruit from one of those trees. And in just a few hours they looked at trees

a little differently.

"I had no idea they were here," says Nina Eshleman, of Pequea Township.

These trees have history. They're big, old and have environmental significance, Rosenfeld says. They should be noticed.

"The thing I'd like to see most of all is the public awareness," he says. "So they don't get cut down by somebody who's too oblivious, indifferent or ignorant to know better."

Rosenfeld grows hickories, spruces and more at Go Native Tree Farm, a native plant nursery he owns in West Hempfield Township. He also notices big trees in his travels and suggested a big-tree-measuring field trip during last month's Native Plants in the Landscape conference at Millersville University.

Their first stop is the elm tree next to a former plant nursery. Rosenfeld's five helpers strain their necks to see the top of the tree and then start measuring.

They find the diameter of

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Tree expert John Rosenfeld uses a clinometer to measure the height of a huge elm tree along Columbia Avenue.

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the trunk first: 5.8 feet.

To find the height, Rosenfeld uses a clinometer to make some calculations. Later, he crunches the numbers to determine the tree is 111 feet tall.

And last, they fan out to measure the spread of the tree's branches. This is tricky with the traffic, but a school bus making several stops gives them a few minutes to measure branches stretching over the road.

The spread is 83.5 feet. Those numbers make this the second-largest elm in the Pennsylvania Big Trees database.

Before they move on, the group notices the neighbors are watching.

This tree is special, Rosenfeld tells them. Don't chainsaw an elm tree like this.

There's a pit stop to compare an American chestnut and a Chinese hybrid chestnut.

Then they're off to a pecan tree down the street, surrounded by macadam. Rosenfeld first noticed it from the parking lot of the El Serrano restaurant next door.

Pecans are hardy enough to grow in Lancaster County, but they're not native to this area, Rosenfeld says.

"Someone came back from the Civil War and planted this in the 1860s; that's my guess," he says.

As the crew starts measuring, Phil Saunders, president of the adjacent Sign Medix shop, comes outside to see what's going on. The tree's been there as long as he can remember, and his employees know not to park underneath it when pecans

start falling.

Saunders brings a box of pecans for everyone to try.

"Aren't they tasty?" he asks.

They measure, and later Rosenfeld calculates the tree is 4.3 feet in diameter, 97 feet tall with a spread of 88 feet, making it the biggest pecan tree in Pennsylvania.

Next up is a tree so special it has two streets named after it — Plane Tree Drive and Old Tree Road.

The American sycamore fills the front yard of a farmhouse-turned-office building. Much of the trunk is gone, and the tree dips low to the ground, bolstered by a few supports. Yet it's still covered in leaves.

The tree is already in the database as the tree with the most Pennsylvania Big Trees points in



ERIN NEGLEY | STAFF WRITER

Two streets are named after this American sycamore: Plane Tree Drive and Old Tree Road.

Lancaster County.

So the group just stops and stares.

Cecelia Harrington, of Mountville, doesn't plan on measuring trees on her own, but she still loves discovering new things throughout Lancaster County, like this tree.

"It gives me an idea of what's out there, what to look for," she says.

The last tree is near the

Lancaster Liederkranz.

It's a sycamore Rosenfeld remembers from his childhood. "When I was a kid, it was a lot bigger," he says as they get closer.

They navigate through the edge of a creek to measure 8.3 feet in diameter, 119 feet tall with a spread of 85 feet. That gives the tree a larger score than the one with two streets to its name. It's the fifth-

largest sycamore in the state.

"I love this stuff," says Ron Chen, of Princeton, New Jersey, as they wrap up.

Once Rosenfeld's calculations are complete, he will send the information to Pennsylvania Big Trees' database of nearly 1,700 trees. And each one of them will keep looking for more.