



MY TURN

The benefits of trees are as plentiful as their leaves

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Instinctively, most of us head for the shady side of the block when taking a walk. Hess Drive in Highland and Jay Street in Griffith both have a wonderful canopy of leaves to walk or ride a bicycle under. We avoid streets with no shade, especially in the searing heat of August.

Many local towns have lost significant tree cover to Dutch Elm tree disease and now, the Emerald Ash Borer. With these waves of bugs and disease, we lose a little of what makes our communities livable and pleasing.

Starting in the 1990s, communities and developers planted Ash trees for their pleasing look and leafy cover. Now, Ash borer disease has stripped these sites of the softening appeal of the Ash tree.

Twenty years later, we are re-learning the lesson that farmers and arborists learned long ago - diversity is the key to a healthy ecosystem. Communities have been faced with identifying Ash trees on public property and removing them in order to stem the disease.

Someday, hopefully soon, we will have a disease resistant strain that can withstand the Ash borer. In the meantime, we need to diversify before disease strikes the more plentiful Silver Maple population in the area.

The Morton Arboretum recently sent educators to Highland's Lincoln Center, at the invitation of the Highland Community Foundation, to promote the health and economic benefits of trees to local policy makers.

The benefits that trees bring to new and older developments range from the obvious aesthetic qualities to the less measurable, but no less beneficial, noise reduction. There is an argument that trees create a much cheaper form of storm water management than increasing the capacity of storm water systems, among a host of other benefits for the environmentally conscious.

The educators stressed the need to build community support for trees in our neighborhoods. Take stock of your neighborhood's tree inventory. If lacking, take a look at the Morton Arboretum website, www.mortonarb.org for a host of tools to bolster your arguments and change the way you look at your town.