

OUTREACH



Setting Roots

Students plant trees in Southwind Park

Written by Karen Carlson • Photography by James Hawker

On a chilly Saturday morning, medical students dressed in baggy jeans and college sweatshirts gently unwrap the roots of 72 young trees in Southwind Park. The trees are carefully laid in deep holes. With boots caked with mud, the students grasp shovels to pad the fragile roots with rich, heavy soil.

While tree planting is not the typical way medical students spend a Saturday morning, this outing was a service learning project for students at SIU School of Medicine in Springfield. About 30 medical students volunteered for the effort. "I'd rather be here than in the library," jokes Chris Slater, class of '11. He and fellow student Meghan Freund, class of '11, encouraged their peers to come. "It's great to get out and help the environment and the community for a worthy cause," Freund says.

Workers from the Springfield Parks District placed the large trees, estimated at six to eight years old, in holes near its entrances of Southwind Park, a new park currently under development on the southern edge of Springfield.

The trees, shipped from Kendall Hill Nursery in Newark, Ill., and Schaddel Trees in Pleasant Plains, are all native to Illinois. Students helped plant Red Buds, Swamp White Oaks, Norway Maples, Austrian Pines, Sugar Maples, Red Bud, and Norway Spruces, to name a few that are now growing along South Second Street.

The trees were purchased with a \$15,000 donation given by radiologists at Memorial Medical Center and St. John's Hospital, collectively known as The Academic Radiology Group. "This contribution allowed us to purchase larger trees, and that has a huge impact," notes Southwind Park Spokesperson Diane Mathis.

These private radiologists serve as volunteer faculty at the School of Medicine. Andrew Sherrick, M.D., '90, chair of Department of Radiology at SIU, spearheaded the effort. "We wanted to give something back to the community. Our suggestion was that the donation be used to plant trees, and Southwind Park is a great place for it." Dr. Sherrick

has a passion for trees and has planted 20,000 trees on his farm, west of Springfield. "I want to decrease my carbon footprint," he says. "Trees conserve the soil and decrease environmental emissions, as well as provide habitat for wildlife."

About 1,000 trees are growing in the 80 acres of farmland that are transforming into The Edwin Watts Southwind Park, which, in late October, had plenty of open space for the medical students' dogs to run around. "It's an all-people park," Mathis says. "Everybody can be at a place and enjoy nature and recreational activities."

After the planting, Mathis met with the medical students to tell them about the unprecedented park, which is serving as a national model and setting a new standard for accessibility.

"Everything is accessible," Mathis says, from the 10 foot-wide urban trail to the sports courts and fishing pier. Features of accessibility include a sensory garden with fragrant flowers and herbs; park signage will be color-coded, along with large type and Braille; specially-designed golf carts will accommodate wheelchairs and walkers; a teletype system will help communication with the deaf.

"I'm proud to be part of the community that understands the need of a venue like this park,"

Mathis says, encouraging more people to volunteer. "The only way this is being built is through community support. We are so happy that the SIU students were able to be a part of it."

Among its notable attractions, the park will feature one of the world's largest windmills, a maze made of prairie grass, a water fountain, the city's largest playground, a Ferris wheel, a light and water show, an amphitheater, and recreation center.

The first phase of the park is slated for completion this summer. Mathis says donations such as the trees are making the park possible. "It's a great way to get involved and leave a legacy." The SIU medical students will be able to visit their legacy for decades to come. ●●●

