

Turtle Creek People

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Leaders Climb Trees For Arbor Day

Miller organizes 3-part challenge to raise awareness for urban forest

By Stefanie Ackerman

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It's a bird! It's a squirrel! What *is* in that tree? Oh, it's Dallas Mayor Laura Miller.

In a unique mayoral activity, Miller challenged other civic leaders to "Go Climb a Tree." She organized the three-part challenge, co-sponsored by the Dallas Urban Forest Advisory Committee, to highlight the importance of Dallas' trees. The event was scheduled to coincide with the city's Arbor Day celebration on April 19.

Miller said she wants to change the view of Dallas as a concrete jungle, to give it a reputation as a pedestrian-friendly city.

"For too long, people thought of Dallas as all car," Miller said.

The mayor and 10 others were set to race to the top of a tree in Reverchon Park last Thursday, using climbing apparatus and giving their abs a good workout while crunching to the top. Once at the top, the competitors have to cut down a ribbon, ring a bell, and safely return to the ground.

The climbing challenge is part of the city's broader effort to increase Dallas' tree coverage and increase the quality of life in Dallas, said Meranda Carter Cohen, Miller's chief of staff.

By drawing attention to the trees in Reverchon Park and the adjacent Katy Trail, the mayor hopes to bring regional awareness to urban forestry and preservation.

She also challenged officials to offer a pledge to plant more trees and provide better care for existing trees in their respective cities.

"Basically, climbing a tree is not as easy as when I was 7," Miller said, after her practice climb on April 5.

Though a few of the civic leaders were at the practice climb, Miller had a slight competitive edge. In 2003, she climbed a Dallas tree for similar reasons and was spied practicing again on April 12.

The next event was busting open a piñata, a papier-mâché tree filled with seeds of indigenous plants. Miller said the idea came from her husband, former State Rep. Steven Wolens. The final challenge was to plant a tree in the quickest time.

"Why do we go to areas like parks and forests? So we can recharge," said Carol Strain-Burk, mayor pro tem of Lancaster. "Just to be able to listen to nature, it's something everyone in the community deserves to have."

Strain-Burk recently spearheaded the creation of the 128-acre Bear Creek Nature Preserve in her city.



Staff photo: Jeremy Chesnutt

Mayor Laura Miller reaches out for another limb as she looks for the bell to ring while practicing for the Mayor's Tree Climbing Challenge.

The challenge to plant more trees was met by the National Arbor Day Foundation, Frito-Lay, and The Friends of Katy Trail, said Eric Paulson, spokesman for the Friends. Frito-Lay donated money for 100 trees to the National Arbor Day Foundation. Frito-Lay volunteers planted the trees along the Trail.

“We’ve come a long way in strategic planning,” said Steve Houser, chairman of the Urban Forest Advisory Committee. “Let me put it this way, there was never a city effort to manage or plant trees.”

Houser has petitioned, spoken, and even let his hair grow to his waist just to show his dedication to preserving and maintaining trees in Dallas. He and Miller said they often exchanged comments about forest preservation, and that it only made sense to appoint him as chairman in 2005 of the new committee.

In 2006, the city hired Walter Passmore, Dallas’ first Urban Forester, to help reverse the decline in the city’s urban forest.

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