

# Trees are indicator of people below

TREES FROM A1

last year and found a heavy concentration in Northwest and Capitol Hill but merely a sprinkling in the city's poorest wards.

Doris Gudger of Anacostia is among those who see little to like about lots of trees. When city crews showed up one recent day and planted some in front of her rowhouse in Southeast Washington, she wanted them gone.

The pollen would aggravate her allergies, she said. The leaves would be a pain to rake. The shade would draw drug dealers. And, she feared, soon would follow affluent gentrifiers and higher taxes, pushing out older residents like herself.

"To me, the trees create more problems than when they weren't there," said Gudger, 61, a retired secretary.

But environmentalists in the District need the buy-in of residents.

The city has often been praised for its urban forest, boosted by trees on the federally owned Mall and in Rock Creek Park. But only 36 percent of the overall canopy remains, a decrease from 50 percent in 1950. The decline is due in large part to development, a trend that can also be seen in the suburbs.

The city and nonprofit groups have been trying to plant at least 8,600 trees a year in the District in an effort to increase the canopy to 40 percent in the next two decades. Working with neighbors is becoming more important in preserving the tree canopy, because much of the plantable land left is in private yards rather than in parks and other public spaces.

But urban foresters hoisting their shovels to plant in underserved areas say they frequently run into residents like Gudger, who worry about whether the city will help maintain the trees and other issues.

"By and large, in areas where people have more disposable income, you'll see greener areas and a better understanding of what trees and greenery provide," said Mark Buscaino, executive director of Casey Trees, a local nonprofit organization that has been working to restore the District's tree canopy for more than a decade.

Over the years, Buscaino said in an interview, Casey Trees has learned the hard way that it does no good to plant trees if there is no community support for them. In its early years, the group planted dozens of trees that ended up withering and dying because no one watered them. Now, the group does tree plantings only when a homeowners association or community group asks for help, Buscaino says. Over the years, that has helped cut the tree mortality rate to 16 percent.

But some environmentalists



PHOTOS BY BILL O'LEARY/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Volunteers from the neighborhood and staff from the nonprofit group Casey Trees plant trees in Glennecrest. Advocates of urban planting say that getting a neighborhood involved is critical to the survival of trees: Without someone watering them and keeping an eye on their condition, young trees in a city often die.**

argue that it's not enough to just show up at community meetings, extol the virtues of trees and expect the residents to embrace planting them. The foresters often are perceived as outsiders, and that can make people appreciate

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Mark Buscaino, head of Casey Trees

hensive, says Dennis Chestnut, a Casey Trees volunteer who is also the executive director of Groundwork Anacostia, an environmental group.

Taking the time to convince individuals can make the difference, he says.

When Xavier Brown, 27, director of urban agriculture at a nonprofit group called the Green Scheme, which works to raise environmental awareness in the District, planted a community garden last year in Lincoln Heights, he at first found little enthusiasm among the neighbors.

He spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to make gardening look cool to the younger residents. He even tried the visual stunt of planting a sunflower in a Ken Griffey Jr. Nike shoe.

After residents got to know Brown, a District native, and sampled the abundant vegetables that poured out of the garden, a tree planting on the property this spring was much better attended. He turned it into a mini-block party, with kale salad, sandwiches and a DJ.

Turns out there were any number of groups willing to help, he

says, but it took him a while to figure out whom. "You really have to know how to network with people and have to talk to the right people to get the community involved," said Brown, who also is a citizen forester with Casey Trees.

One recent Saturday, Brown and about 100 others gathered in a vacant lot in Glennecrest, a development of about 200 townhouses painted in primary colors in Southeast that has a mix of renters and live-in owners. Casey Trees had donated 19 trees — shade trees and fruit trees — for the vacant lot, once a magnet for litter and weeds. As the father of one of the homeowners played jazz on a boombox, the volunteers wielded shovels and flung piles of dirt. The scent of topsoil and mulch filled the spring air.

Residents of the development said they were excited about the additions to their neighborhood, although many seemed uncertain about who would assume stewardship of the trees after they were planted. Some thought Casey Trees staff members would be returning to maintain the trees. In fact, that job would be up to the residents.

"This is ours, our own personal tree?" Jalen Webb, 9, asked his mother Dina Webb, a homemaker, after they had planted an American sweet gum.

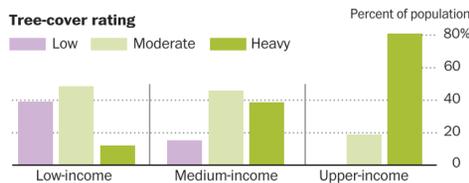
She nodded and gave him a hug. Before the city cleared the lot and the tree planting began, "it looked bad. It didn't look good when you rolled by," she said. "Now, it's going to look nice. We got to keep it watered."

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**BRANCHING OUT** A gallery of photos of the tree-planting in Glennecrest in the District is a postlocal.com.

## Comparing tree cover with income levels

Lower-income neighborhoods in the District are far more likely to have a low tree-cover rating. Most upper-income areas have heavy tree cover.



Tree-cover rating: **81%**  
Median household income: **\$205,750**



Tree-cover rating: **64%**  
Median household income: **\$78,523**



Tree-cover rating: **48%**  
Median household income: **\$36,250**



The **tree-cover rating** for each neighborhood is a theoretical measure reflecting the current tree canopy and the remaining plantable area. Low is less than 50 percent, and high is more than 67 percent. Some plantable areas may not be suitable for trees.

Sources: University of Vermont Spatial Analysis Laboratory; USDA Forest Service; Casey Trees; Sandia National Laboratories; Montgomery, Prince George's and Fairfax counties; satellite imagery via Google Earth Pro.

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