

Local View: ReTree program a good response

By SCOTT J. JOSIAH

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In recent weeks, a series of severe storms left swaths of destruction throughout Nebraska. Homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed, power lines were downed, outbuildings were toppled, and thousands of trees were devastated. Strong winds — some in excess of 70 mph — ripped branches from trees. Combined with saturated soil, these winds made trees especially vulnerable to uprooting.

Power, fire and police crews have worked tirelessly to respond to emergency calls, restore power and clear damage. Homeowners have emerged from the storm to assess damage to their property and begin cleanup. And the severe weather season is just starting.

These storms bring to light the fragility of our community infrastructure, including our “green infrastructure” — community forests. Nebraska’s weather long has been tough on trees. Ice storms, wind storms, tornadoes and severe thunderstorms have all taken a toll on our community forests. Certain species, such as silver maple, Bradford pear, green ash and Siberian elm, are especially prone to storm damage. All of these species are, unfortunately, widely planted in communities across our state.

We all know that trees clean our air and water, but many don’t know their benefits extend far beyond these. Trees increase property values, reduce crime rates and make business districts more attractive to consumers. Trees prevent wear and tear on streets and filter storm water runoff. Trees save scarce and expensive energy by shading our buildings and reducing our cooling bills.

The community forests we all enjoy today are the result of foresight and planning by previous generations. Our great-grandparents who had a vision and planted trees in our city parks and cemeteries. Our parents who helped us plant a shade tree that would one day grow tall enough to support a tire swing.

Now it’s our turn.

While this spring’s tree planting season is coming to a close, it’s time to begin planning for fall tree planting. This fall, plant a tree to replace one that was lost or damaged this spring or sometime in the past. Trees don’t live forever, so plant a tree to replace one that is getting on in years. Plant a tree to enhance your landscape and property value. And plant trees to shade your home and/or business and save up to 30 percent on cooling costs.

ReTree Nebraska, a 10-year, cooperative initiative to restore and revitalize our state’s community forests and properly plant and maintain 1 million community trees, can help. As you visit a nursery to select your tree for fall planting, look for the green ReTree tag on ReTree “preferred” species. You can trust that these “Good Trees for the Good Life” will become beautiful, long-lived landscape additions that are well-adapted to the rigors of Nebraska’s climate. Visit

www.retreenebraska.unl.edu to learn more about ReTree Nebraska, as well as selecting, planting and caring for trees. And this fall, make a real difference — plant a tree.

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