

# UT's trees receive top-notch care

## Forester fulfills 'passion for plants' by caring for more than 4,000 trees

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Above, Larry Maginnis, UT's urban forester, tends to a direct descendant of the tree under which Buddha achieved enlightenment. Below, Maginnis climbs a tree near his campus office.

*Editor's note: This is the first story in a series about unique and interesting jobs on campus.*

Larry Maginnis is a tree man. He climbs them, he prunes them, he talks to them, he loves them, and for the past four years, he has been personally responsible for the health and happiness of more than 4,000 of them.

As UT's urban forester, Maginnis knows more about the University's 4,817 trees than anyone else does.

"Everybody gets paid to do something here on campus," Maginnis said. "Mine is trees." His passion for plants was cultivated between rows of apple trees on the Pennsylvania farm where he worked while in high school. After earning a bachelor's degree in forestry from the University of Montana, Maginnis spent 11 years caring for trees as the city forester in Missoula, Mont., before coming to UT.

Now, with a crew of four arborists, Maginnis does very little tree pruning. Instead, he is a full-time tree saver. He inspects soil to prevent root dehydration and teaches construction crews to work around root systems.

UT's trees are worth more than \$26 million, Maginnis said. While most are live oaks or cedar elms, there are more than 60 different types of trees taking root across campus.

Maginnis cited a variety of benefits the UT community derives from its trees. In a day, one tree supplies enough oxygen for two people. Shade from trees can extend asphalt's life by 80 percent and lowers the temperature on campus by 2 to 3 degrees.

"UT is a city inside a city," Maginnis said. "There's this interface between people and nature that we have to keep in balance."

Facilities Services Manager John Burns said the urban forester position was created after landscape services was reorganized seven years ago. He said the department realized that it needed someone to protect UT's trees because they are such an asset to the campus.

"Larry has more passion for his job and for trees than anyone I've ever seen," Burns said. "He's been a great asset for the department and for the University as a whole."

UT has a policy of "zero net loss," Maginnis said, meaning that if he cuts down one tree he plants another. With the help of student groups such as Tejas and the Campus Environmental Center, Maginnis planted 180 saplings last year.

"What would the East Mall be without the trees?" he asked. "It would be a miserable, miserable place."

Maginnis said that the never-ending construction is his biggest obstacle to keeping UT's trees healthy. With new crews working on the 40 Acres every day, Maginnis is constantly trying to teach them how to keep from damaging trees with cranes, bulldozers and jackhammers.

"Their job isn't to be tree people," he said. "That's mine. I'm the tree authority."

One of Maginnis' most famous specimens is what he calls the "celebre-tree," a bodhi ficus that is a direct descendent of the tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment. The bodhi was planted near the Union Ballroom five years ago and was blessed by the Dalai Lama.

This indoor tree creates a host of problems for Maginnis. Without rainfall, he must bathe the tree about once a month. A special lighting system was installed to mimic the sun's path across the sky each day. Maginnis waters the tree once a week with spring water that is shipped from Louisiana and mixed with all-natural seaweed fertilizer.

"Ficus are trees you love to hate," Maginnis said. "You look at it wrong, and it starts to wilt."

Tucked back in a top-secret location, Maginnis has been tenderly caring for “the most significant of any tree on campus.” It is a sixth-generation descendent from the apple tree that Sir Isaac Newton sat under in the 1660s when an apple supposedly hit him in the head, leading him to develop his theory of gravity.

“I come here about twice a week to give it a little love and talk to it,” Maginnis said. “Austin, Texas, is a rough place to grow an apple tree.”