

UT Arborist Maginnis Sees Campus Differently

By Emily Pennington

Most students spend their transit time on campus bustling through traffic, weaving their way through hoards of students or worrying about the upcoming lecture, oblivious to their surroundings, but Larry Maginnis spends most of his time on campus looking up and keeping students, faculty and staff from being what he calls "targets." Maginnis, the University's first urban forester, who is well known among friends and colleagues as "The Tree Guy," does not see campus the way the rest of us do. His main job is to oversee the pruning, nurturing, watering, moving or cutting down of the 4,817 trees valued at more than \$24 million on UT's campus with the help of just three employees. That breaks down to 1,204 trees per person.

Most UT students view the "Six Pack" as a grassy lounge area where anyone can go to relax or

study, but when Maginnis looks at the area lush with trees he sees back to 1863 when General John Magruder ordered his troops to cut down all of the trees on UT's forty acres during the Civil War. Magruder, who was convinced an attack was inevitable, used the wood for fortifications for the capitol building. The trees that survived and the oldest trees on campus are known as The Battle Oaks, three trees that stand next to Hogg Auditorium. Maginnis can look at just about any tree on campus and tell when it was planted.

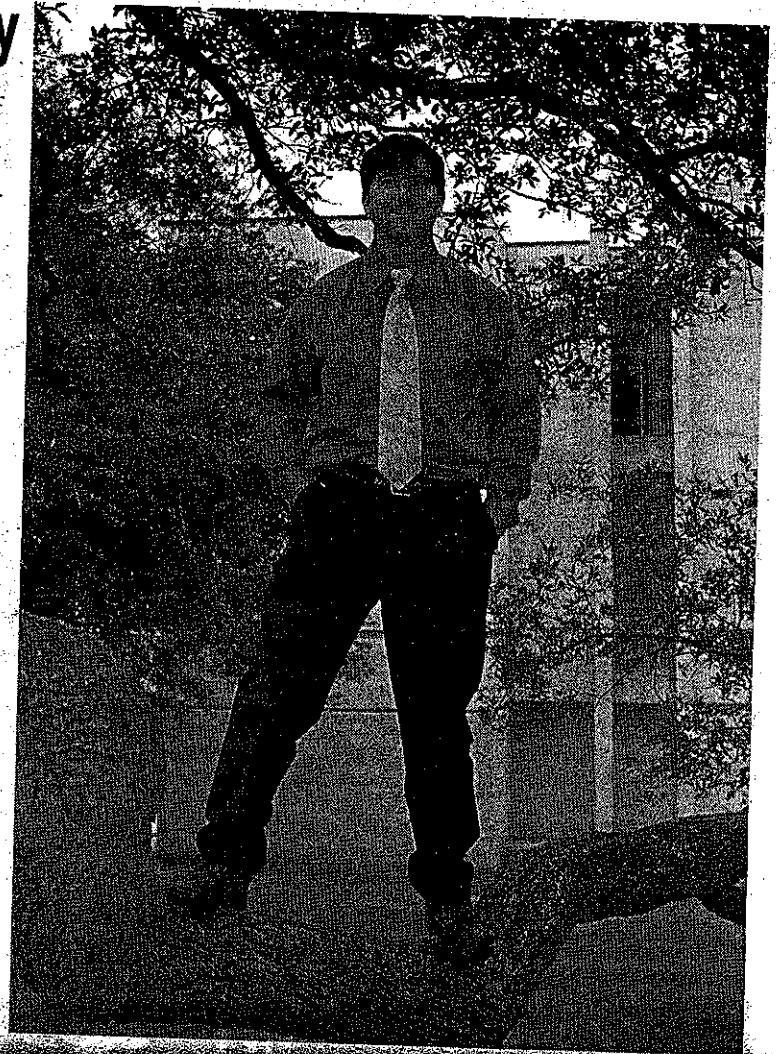
"Larry's charisma is hard to resist," said John Burnes, manager of landscape services. "It is so much fun watching him enjoy his work with trees."

Maginnis works on an arbo-real project that many will never see: a potted Pride of Kent. He has lovingly watered, nurtured and talked to it for the past four years. The Pride of Kent is a direct descendant of the apple tree

that inspired Newton's theory of gravity, and UT is one of only a few universities—York University in Canada, University of Nebraska and Washington State University—to have received one.

Maginnis said the tree, which was given to UT by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, was the only item shipped in a semi truck. "It came in a coffin," Maginnis joked. "I guess the idea was that if I kill it I get to bury myself in it." The Pride of Kent will eventually go in front of the Dell Computer Science Center when it is completed.

There are plenty of threats to the health of UT's trees that most people would never recognize. For example, many see cute squirrels scampering about while Maginnis sees a major threat to the health of a tree. "Squirrels can completely strip all the bark off a tree," he said. "They chew it for sustenance—they like the inner bark and then they kill the



branches.”

Protective measures that are invisible to the untrained eye are also in place. Benches surrounding a tree might seem like a place to rest, but Maginnis views them as tree protection because “a truck will come in here and bash into a tree no problem, but they will not back into a bench.”

However, Maginnis generally prefers to practice the kind of tree protection in which others can be involved. Tree Campus USA is a program that recognizes U.S. college campuses that “effectively manage their campus trees and develop connectivity with the community.” Two such efforts are Longhorn ReLeaf, an ongoing volunteer tree-planting program created for students, and annual certified tree worker events on campus. In 2008, Maginnis’ efforts earned him recognition as Ar-

borist of the Year in Texas.

“Since Larry joined our team here at Landscape Services, he has raised awareness about trees across the campus,” Burnes said. “It seems that students, faculty, staff and in our case—most importantly—our management have a new appreciation for the importance of trees on this campus.”

Although his passion for the trees takes up most of his time, Maginnis said when he needs to “turn his brain off,” he can be found restoring his 1952 Chevy pickup truck. He likes to work in his garage and is the go-to guy when his friends and neighbors need something done to their cars. “I think I’m a better mechanic than forester,” Maginnis said. “If anything ever goes wrong I can do that.” He also enjoys riding motorcycles, especially through ghost towns.

Maginnis is originally from State College, Pa., which he described as the town in the movie “Pleasantville” before the color. He earned his two-year degree in forestry from Penn State before he moved to Montana where he spent most of his time climbing rocks and discovering arboriculture. He worked his way up through a program in Montana and eventually became Missoula’s city forester in charge of 15,000 trees.

When most people see a bare patch of land, Maginnis sees opportunity. A program he created and is currently working on with the Longhorn ReLeaf organization is the memorial tree program that allows a person or group of people to purchase a living memorial to someone that has passed away. UT provides the supplies and a small ceremony, if desired, and the money earned benefits the

Longhorn ReLeaf program.

“Larry has brought UT’s arboreal landscape to the forefront, where turf and trees are major contributors to the education and protection of young, influential minds,” said Bridget Blizzard, associate director of facilities services.

There are just as many trees threatened by campus expansion as saved by Maginnis and his organization. “With the footprint of these buildings and the footprint of campus getting bigger it becomes a problem to the trees,” he said. Therefore, Maginnis acts as a defender, telling the construction workers what is and is not going to hurt UT’s trees.

“It’s a constant battle and I’ll never win,” Maginnis said. “It’s a machine and I’ll do my best to pick fights where I can, but at the end of the day it’s progress.”

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