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Rediscovered monument pays tribute to fallen, 300-year-old oak tree

By Robert Koch Updated 11:06 am, Tuesday, September 5, 2017



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Norwalk Tree Advisory Chairman and The Care of Trees Arborist, Richard Whitehead, and Norwalk Tree Advisory Committee and Norwalk Tree Alliance member, Andrew Strauss, point out the stone monument that marked ... [more](#)

NORWALK — As a child, Rich Whitehead looked forward to Sunday drives with his father to see the mighty oak tree that once stood along old Ely Avenue in South Norwalk.

White recalls his father placing him on his lap and allowing him to “drive” the car before arriving at what was then 172 Ely Ave. to see the giant red oak tree.

“I remember looking at it when I was tiny and said, ‘Man, that’s a big tree.’ ” Whitehead said. “And then years and years and years and decades went by. Now my company is around the corner and I drive by (the location) everyday. I said, I

wonder what ever happened to that old tree? Maybe looking at the old tree made me an arborist."

'Legacy Oak' bears witness

Whitehead, now chairman of the Norwalk Tree Alliance and supervisor and arborist for the Care of Trees on Wilson Avenue, satisfied his curiosity by stopping at the site of the former tree — now the entrance to the UPS facility at 190 Dr. Martin Luther King Drive.

The massive tree, which was estimated to have been 300 years old, fell into decay and was removed in the 1970s, according to Whitehead.

But its legacy lives on in the form of fallen acorns, descendant oak trees and a stone monument honoring the original tree. The recently rediscovered monument reads: "Second Largest Red Oak Known Norwalk Chapter D.A.R. 1951." The Norwalk-Village Green Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution placed the monument as part of the city's 300th anniversary.

Sixty-six years later, the Tree Alliance, Tree Advisory Committee and Norwalk DAR plan to rededicate the monument and create "Legacy Oak Park" around one of the descendant oak trees that sprung up at the location. The rededication is planned for this fall. The date has yet to be determined.

The largest descendant tree, which they've named the "Legacy Oak," stands in the city right-of-way to the left of the UPS facility entrance. It measures nearly four feet in diameter at its base.

"While the original oak is long gone, the descendant 'Legacy Oak' is thriving today. The stone monument, discarded to history with the memory of the original oak, recently has been discovered at the original site," reads the purpose statement drafted by the Tree Alliance. "Our vision is to bring back to living history the Legacy Oak with a destination park that celebrates Norwalk's past, present and growing future. "

The small park would include the 1951 stone monument, remounted and rededicated on a stone pad with an educational historical marker as well as park

benches under the limbs of the "Legacy Oak." A corporate sponsor will be sought to fund the project.

"Because this is a historical oak, it helps create awareness of the importance of trees to the Norwalk community," said Andrew Strauss, a member of the Tree Alliance and Tree Advisory Committee. "It's a living part of that history. This tree is a descendant of the former tree just like the Charter Oak."

Monument long off radar

Lisa Wilson Grant, regent for the Norwalk DAR, learned about the long-lost stone monument while attending the Tree Alliance's open house at Fodor Farm this summer.

"Rich Whitehead showed me on his phone a picture of it. I had never seen it. It was off everyone's radar at the Daughters of the American Revolution chapter. Nobody remembered 1951," Grant said. "I dashed over the first thing next morning to see it."

The original oak tree wasn't off the radar during Norwalk's 300th anniversary celebration in 1951. In August of that year, the Norwalk DAR dedicated the stone monument during a well-attended ceremony. The original tree, which was still there at the time, stood 90 feet high, had a branch spread of 85 feet and "was considered the champion class for Northern Red Oak by the American Forestry Association," according to a story that ran in *The Norwalk Hour* at the time.

Grant finds it fitting to rededicate the monument and recognize the descendant trees this year — the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Norwalk DAR.

"Being descendants ourselves from patriots of the American Revolution, I find it fitting to celebrate the 'descendant trees' that exist at the site today and look forward to working collaboratively with the Norwalk Tree Alliance on this project," Grant said.

The project partners have taken preliminary steps. On July 15, Grant and other Norwalk DAR members removed bittersweet vines and uncovered the monument.

On Aug. 26, Strauss, Whitehead and volunteers from The Care of Trees pruned the "Legacy Oak."



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