

enterprise

YOLO COUNTY NEWS



The 50-year old Kentucky coffee tree on Regis Dr. is the Godfather of 200,000 Espresso Kentucky coffee trees planted worldwide. Joan Cartwright and J. Frank Schmidt Nursery/Courtesy photo

Features

Great Tree Search: Café Davis

By Special to The Enterprise

In the 1950s and '60s, members of the Davis Tree Commission, including Richard Harris and Phil Barker, worked with the city to plant and evaluate the performance of different species of trees along new streets in east Davis. Their goal was to diversify the mix of species with trees proven to be well-adapted to local conditions.

About 20 Kentucky coffee trees were planted along Regis Drive in the late 1960s. During his annual observations U.S. Forest Service research horticulturist Barker saw that the tree in front of the Brashears' home (2115 Regis) stood out as exceptional. In 1986 Barker invited horticulturist Keith Warren of J. Frank Schmidt Nursery in Oregon to see the tree.

Martha Brashear, who nominated the tree, remembers her husband and others measuring and studying the tree that by now shaded and cooled their home. It was pronounced a favorite because it had all of the desirable features of the species without the troublesome traits. It was tough, heat- and drought-tolerant, tolerant of clay soils, and relatively fast-growing, with a large, vase-shaped crown. It was a male tree, so seeds were not produced, and the large banana peel-like pods didn't litter the crown and ground below.

Barker sent cuttings to Warren for propagation and evaluation. Over the next decade, the nursery struggled to find an effective way to propagate clones genetically identical to this parent tree. Eventually they refined their techniques, named and trademarked it as 'Espresso-JFS', and offered the new tree in their 1994 catalog. Despite ongoing production challenges, by 2010 they were steadily producing trees for sale and began to highlight the handsome tree on Regis Drive in their marketing materials. Nationwide sales grew at a steady rate, and since 2010, nearly 200,000 have been sold.

Today, Espresso Kentucky coffee tree is the most popular and widely planted coffee tree cultivar in



Martha Brashear stands in front of the 50-year old Kentucky coffee tree with a photo of her home and recently planted tree. Martha

the country. The iconic tree on Regis Dr. stands 55 feet tall with a girth of 7 feet. It is truly one of Davis's Great Trees. Planted 50 years ago as an experiment, it is the progenitor of thousands of Espresso Kentucky coffee trees planted annually worldwide.

Brashear/Courtesy photo



Chinning Tree

According to his son Edwin, who nominated this tree because of its unusual form, Barker grafted a European hornbeam onto the parent to make this odd-shaped tree. He called it his "chinning tree," and hung flower pots from the horizontal branch. It seems that Treebeard from "The Lord of the Rings" has arrived in Davis. You can see it at 405 Antioch Drive.

Phil Barker's "chinning tree" reminds one of JRR Tolkein's Ents. Courtesy photo

— Submitted by Dr. Greg McPherson, vice president, Tree Davis Board of Directors and retired U.S. Forest Service urban forest researcher. Be part of Tree Davis' Great Tree Search when it begins again in the fall by nominating a tree you love and appreciate because of its species, size, form, history, or whatever. Readers will be able to nominate trees on-line by clicking on the Great Tree Search banner, downloading a paper form on the website at <http://www.treedavis.org/city-of-davis/gts-final-v2-2/>, or requesting a form at 530-757-7337.