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Features

Great Davis Tree Search: The dinosaurs

By Special to The Enterprise

Paul Kelly lives on Dinosaur Place in West Davis, and has a dinosaur-era relic growing in his front yard; a Wollemi pine emerges like a cathedral spire from a mass of plants.

This plant, a conifer but not a true pine, was thought to have gone extinct 2 million years ago, with fossils dating back to 200 million years ago. In 1994 a small grove of about 100 trees was discovered by explorers in Australia's Blue Mountains. Kelly obtained the tree in 2007 after learning about the National Geographic Society's effort to help protect the species and safeguard its continued survival.

Since he planted it as a 10-inch-tall seedling it has grown to 11 feet tall. The Wollemi pine's evergreen foliage is unique, resembling something between two other members of the Araucaria family, the bunya-bunya and Norfolk Island pine. On close inspection, its bark looks like bubbling chocolate. Hopefully, the Kelly family's tree will continue to thrive and eventually approach a mature height of 100 feet.

Dawn redwood

About 40 years ago, Jean Meyer and her family selected and planted a dawn redwood tree in their backyard on Campbell Place in East Davis. They had heard that it was called a living fossil, and found one at Capitol Nursery in Sacramento.

The species was first found on 200 million-year-old fossils and thought to be extinct. In 1944, a small stand was found in China, and by 1950 seedlings were being distributed to U.S. arboreta and universities. Today it is 80-feet tall (7½ feet in girth) and provides welcome summer shade over her backyard patio.

Dawn redwood is one of the few conifers to drop its needles in winter, providing more sunshine. This trait is considered a symbol of constant renewal. Meyer enjoys her tree's lush fern-like foliage in summer and attractive foxy red-brown color in fall. The small woody cones harken to the species' coniferous quality. Meyer is confident that her Dawn Redwood will continue to keep giving her a great deal of joy.

— 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 online 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.



The wollemi pine at Paul Kelly's residence in West Davis is a dinosaur-era relic. Courtesy photo



The small woody cone-like fruit of Jean Meyer's dawn redwood reflect its ancient past as an evergreen conifer. Courtesy photo