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Features

Great Tree Search: These regal icons stand tall and wide

By Special to The Enterprise

Several Great Trees were nominated this year during the 2020 Great Tree Search because they are among the largest of their species in Davis.

The valley oak at 501 Oak Ave. is the largest tree measured during the search. Its 21-foot girth slightly exceeds that of the 380-year-old giant along old Putah Creek in south Davis. This oak is 120 feet tall with a similar crown spread. It was over 200 years old when European immigrants began to settle here in the 1840s. This massive living landmark can be called a “Witness Tree,” an expression for trees that rested at the corners of parcels when surveyors divvied up land. Oak Avenue was likely named for this tree. Hopefully, it will continue to grace the neighborhood with its uncommon beauty for generations to come.

The Formosan flame tree behind the Friends Hall at 345 L St. is one of the largest in Davis. The crown of this veteran reaches 70 feet and spreads 60 feet. With a girth of 9.6 feet, it is almost the size of its cousin at the northeast corner of Eighth and L streets. These two trees were likely planted at the same time in 1961. Every fall, their crowns are adorned with lipstick pink capsules that follow attractive yellow flowers. Warren Roberts, superintendent of the UC Davis Arboretum, nominated this tree and has long been a proponent of the Formosan flame.

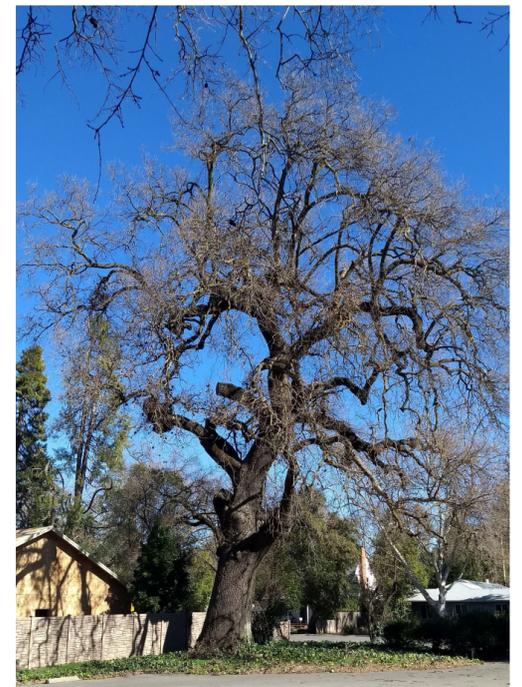
Some trees just refuse to die. Such is the case with the weeping willow at 375 W. Eighth St. Although the exact planting date of this tree is unknown, it was already a large tree in the early 1960s. At the turn of the century, it was a magnificent specimen that visually dominated the intersection of Eighth and Oak streets. Its spread exceeded its 50-foot height and its pendulous branches gracefully brushed the ground. Over the past decade, pests, disease and other stressors have reduced the crown to a skeleton of its former self. The thick, gnarled trunk (9.8-foot girth) supports a crown that barely spreads to 30 feet. As in a horror film, it seems to shrink every year, returning like a zombie tree.

A shiny xylosma hides behind the privets, oaks and other plants along the north border of College Park. This multi-stemmed tree reaches upward 45 feet for the sun. Like an octopus trying to escape a trap, a hackberry tree grows out through the middle of the xylosma’s crown. Xylosma is normally a hedge plant that reaches 10 feet tall, so this is an unusually lofty specimen. Extracts from the evergreen foliage have medicinal uses.

Calamondin is a species of citrus and a hybrid between a kumquat and mandarin orange. The calamondin at 512 K St. reaches 30 feet tall with a 4-foot girth. Usually a shrub, this calamondin provides ample shade and tasty fruit with a distinctive sweet (peel) and sour (fruit) flavor when eaten whole. The fruits are used to make marmalade, juices, sauces and cake.

Ginkgo trees are very slow-growing, which makes the 65-foot-tall one in front of Wilhelmina Currie’s home at 943 Ponderosa Place even more spectacular. The trunk of this ginkgo has a 5.6-foot girth that supports a crown 36 feet in diameter. She loves the leaves, which look like dinosaur footprints and turn buttery yellow in the fall.

A Canary Island pine towers 76 feet above Mont Hubbard’s home, at 43351 Almond Lane, in what was an almond



This valley oak is called a “Witness Tree” because it was massive when surveyors divvied up land along Oak Avenue and it is at the corner of a parcel intersecting with Russell Boulevard. Courtesy photo

orchard before the Willowbank subdivision was developed in 1947. Its hefty trunk has a girth of 15 feet and supports a massive crown that spreads 70 feet. It was planted about 65 years ago when the home was built. The tree has sheltered owls and attracted hawks. About 15 years ago, a nest was blown out of the tree. Hubbard and his daughter built a hawk nest and climbed high into the crown to secure it. They are still waiting for new neighbors to call it home.

— *Submitted by Greg McPherson, a member of the Tree Davis Board of Directors and retired U.S. Forest Service urban forest researcher. This project is made possible by support from Tree Davis sponsor Symphony Financial Planning. These and other stories on what made each tree special were captured in a series of Davis Enterprise articles that can be found at the Tree Davis website <http://www.treedavis.org/programs/great-tree-search>.*