

Why It's All About Trees

Alice has been called "our first conservationist"—and rightly so. Not only did her protective behavior preserve the maritime forest surrounding her home, but also her reluctance to sell off any part of her acreage made it possible for the land to pass unspoiled to her conservation-minded Roosevelt heirs.

Having inherited a passion and respect for the natural world from their grandfather, President Theodore Roosevelt, Alice's great nieces and nephews became the ideal caretakers of a carefully planned, ecologically aware community. When most developers in the 1960s were clearing immense swaths of forest to erect cookie-cutter houses and stripping barrier islands for development, members of the Roosevelt Trust were consulting with attorneys to draw up environmentally sensitive and tree-friendly covenants for Pine Knoll Shores.

The earliest Declarations of Covenants and Restrictions for Roosevelt Property stipulates: "Property owner agrees to leave all vegetation, trees, brooks, creeks, hillsides, springs, water courses and ravines in as near their natural state as is compatible with good building and land use practices. . . Variations in this restriction must be approved by the Architectural Control Committee."

In the ensuing 47 years, Pine Knoll Shores guidelines regarding general treatment and protection of the land and vegetation, especially mature trees, have remained constant. The original intent of preservation and wise management of our island and its unique maritime forest have become a deeply ingrained community code.

Designated as a Tree City USA since 2000, Pine Knoll Shores is one of more than 3,400 communities across the country that take part in this Arbor Day Foundation program. Participating cities range from metropolises like Denver, Colorado, to tiny villages like Golf, Illinois. All of these communities have promised to manage their trees wisely and fulfill the following four requirements set forth by Tree City USA guidelines: 1) maintain a tree board or department, 2) have a community tree ordinance, 3) spend at least \$2 per capita on a tree management program and 4) celebrate Arbor Day annually.

As part of the commitment to an active urban forestry program, several local organizations are engaged in promoting public awareness of our historic trees. In 2004, the PIKSCO Homeowner Association Board of Directors applied to the National Live Oak Society of the Louisiana Garden Club Foundation, Inc., a nationally known registry of heritage trees, to register three of the live oaks in McNeill Park.

To qualify, a tree's circumference must measure eight feet at a distance of ten feet from the ground. Two stately oaks, The PIKSCO Oak and The McNeill Park Oak, met the criteria. The largest, or "signature oak," stands at the entrance of McNeill Park and was named "The Jake

Tree" in honor of Jake Rife, a long-time Pine Knoll Shores resident and community leader. At the time of dedication, The Jake Tree was measured at an astonishing ten feet, ten inches and displayed a branch spread of 80 feet.

The Community Appearance Commission (CAC), which serves as the town's tree board, is also attempting to identify historic and irreplaceable trees through the Pine Knoll Shores Heritage Tree Program. Any homeowner in Pine Knoll Shores can apply to the CAC to nominate a tree for heritage tree designation. The only requirement is filling out a simple form that can be picked up at town hall. Heritage status is determined by "size, age, rarity and botanical, aesthetic or historical value."

The CAC will then inspect the tree. If satisfied that it meets heritage requirements, the CAC will recommend it to the town Board of Commissioners, who will put it to a vote. Pine Knoll Shores Deputy Town Clerk Sarah Williams, who helped develop the current program, reports that to date two trees, Irma's Oak at the home of Jim and Barb Yankauskas, and another live oak on town hall grounds have been approved for heritage status.

Appropriately, the theme chosen for the upcoming Carteret County Museum of History exhibit dedicated to Pine Knoll Shores is "Beach Town in a Forest." No wonder you are smiling, Alice. Thanks to your conservation-minded legacy, Pine Knoll Shores is all about the trees.



The Jake Tree at McNeill Park has been designated as a heritage tree by the National Live Oak Society of the Louisiana Garden Club Foundation, Inc.—Photo by Walt Zaenker



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